

JUNE, 1955

IMAGINATION

STORIES OF SCIENCE AND FANTASY

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35¢

WANTED: ONE SANE MAN

By Frank M. Robinson



Introducing the



AUTHOR

★
Frank M. Robinson



MUCH as I might like to think so, there actually isn't much that's exciting or especially interesting to say about myself. I was born in Chicago some 28 years ago and have lived in and around there ever since. I went to college at Beloit, Wisconsin, collected a degree in physics, and am currently at Northwestern University for a Master's degree in journalism.

I started reading science fiction in 1939, cutting my teeth on Simak's "Cosmic Engineers" and Doc Smith's "Lensman" stories, which I still rate among the best. When I graduated from high school, I worked for a stretch as an office boy at Ziff-Davis publishing company, distributing towels and mailing out books and

magazines. Most of my time I spent hanging around the Amazing Stories offices.

Went into the Navy in 1944 and shortly thereafter found myself stationed at Navy Pier. It was about this time I struck up a friendship with a struggling young writer who was a ready market for my cigarette rations. The writer's name was Bill Hamling; he and Chet Geier had an office on Chicago's north side.

There's not a great deal to say about me personally. Somewhat on the thin side, like individual sports and camping in the Wisconsin wilds. I think more people should know a good deal more about science. Think Oppenheimer got a raw deal and think that

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The Editorial

WE'VE been getting quite a bit of mail lately on two subjects: covers and serials. Since we can't possibly answer all of the letters individually we decided to use the editorial this month as a sort of general comment regarding *Madge's* editorial program.

BOILED down, the gist of the letters concerning covers was that our new "calendar girl" stf look is the best thing to hit the field in many years, but let's not run them into the ground! It seems that in our April issue editorial we left the impression that *Madge* would only run "new look" covers in the future. Not so! We certainly do not intend to ignore the many dramatic themes science fiction brings to mind, or, for that matter, the realm of symbolism and photo-cover techniques (which *Madge* pioneered). You'll be seeing many innovations along these lines as time goes on. In essence we'll be providing a wide variety along with the "new look". As an example we announce next month's cover by W. E. Terry, a truly dramatic theme we're sure you'll like. And after that—a really *different* cover which frankly we can't even categorize! So much for covers.

SERIALS present an editorial problem. Our mail has been very enthusiastic over George O. Smith's novel (concluding this month) and the cry is for more—many more.

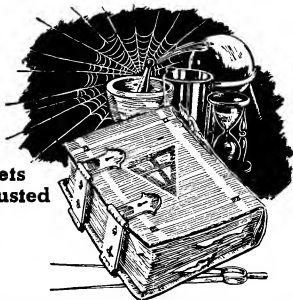
We intend to comply, but the problem is in finding novels well-constructed enough to sustain interest through magazine serialization; many novels simply cannot be broken into sections. We're passing this note along to the science fiction writers: *Madge* will be running serials regularly, but we want novels which can be presented in several parts where the build-up between sections is continual — in other words, no dull sections for a carry-over.

SO there you have it; variety in covers and more serials. . . wh



"Haven't you finished shaving yet?"

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entrusted
to a
few**



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SAN JOSE, CALIFORNIA, U. S. A.



WANTED: One Sane Man

by

Frank M. Robinson

Personnel Incorporated bragged that they could supply a man for any job. Maxwell doubted this, needing a space pilot for the first Lunar trip. Now, if he had just asked for a lunatic . . .

THE small man adjusted his bi-focals and stared critically at the huge brass nameplate over the glass entrance doors. The plate read "Personnel Incorporated" in neat, modest lettering. Directly above the plate was a traveling neon sign which informed the public in letters six feet tall that:

PERSONNEL CAN SUPPLY THE MAN FOR ANY JOB!—SEVENTY-FIVE PER CENT OF THE PERSONNEL PROBLEMS ON THE AMERICAN CONTINENT ARE HANDLED BY PERSONNEL — DOES YOUR JOB SEEM BORING LATELY? SEE PERSONNEL AND BE PSYCHOLOGICALLY FITTED FOR YOUR WORK!—PERSONNEL CAN SUPPLY THE MAN FOR ANY JOB!—SEVENTY-FIVE PER CENT OF THE. . .

The small man looked at it for a minute and turned to his tall companion.

"Tell me, Maxwell, why the seventy-five? Why not eighty or eighty-three?"

Maxwell glanced up at the sign. "If they do seventy-six per cent or more of the business, they're a monopoly. It must pain Whiteford to have to hold himself down to only seventy-five."

"Whiteford?"

Maxwell looked surprised. "You haven't heard of him? The newest boy wonder in the business world? He's the genius who runs this modern slave market." He looked at his watch. "And, incidentally, he's also the guy we've got an appointment with in five minutes."

They joined the crowds streaming up the wide, granite steps and found themselves in the large en-

trance lobby, directly opposite the battery of ascending elevators.

The small man approached the starter. "—ah—pardon me, but would you tell us what floor Personnel Incorporated is on?"

The starter looked shocked. "Poisonnel ain't just on one floor, Mister, it's the whole building. Who'dja wanna see?"

"We wanted to— well, that is— whoever's in . . ."

The starter brushed him aside. "Step outta the way of the passengers, Mister. Be with ya in a second. . . . Okay, lady, maid soivice and domestics is on the thoity-foist floor. Don't shove in the elevator, please! Next elevator, *please!*"

He turned back to the small man.

"We got administration on the foist floor. Second floor, automotive and transportation. Assemblers, welders, painters, cushion upholsterers, sprayers, mock-up men, testers and greasers. Thoid floor, electrical. Solderers, cabinet workers, wirers, draftsmen, coil-winders, and design expoits. Next floor, entertainers. Everything from acrobats to zither players and concert ottists. Fifth. . ."

"We want to see Whiteford," Maxwell cut in impatiently.

The starter looked impressed. "The Chief, eh? Administration's on the foist floor, like I told ya, Mister. Straight down to the end of the curridor and to your left. Ya

can't miss it." He had a second thought and turned and shouted after them. "If ya want a job, General Employment's on the second curridor to your right!"

"**T**HINK this will do any good?" the small man asked, mopping the sweat off his bald head.

"We don't have any choice. We've got to try it." Maxwell pushed open one of the double swinging doors marked "Office of the President."

They walked into the outer fringes of a whirlpool of noise and bedlam, rivaling that of a stock exchange or a grain pit in the middle of the harvesting season. The room covered more than an acre, with ninety per cent of the floor space devoted to adding machines, typewriters, tabulators, collators, sorters, key punches, automatic alphabetizers and the other ten per cent to their operators. A battery of sorters on their left digested stacks of small, white cards and spewed forth more stacks of them into waiting hoppers. On their right, the nearest of three switchboard operators smiled a weak greeting and turned back to her board.

"Personnel Incorporated. National Carbide and Carbon? Just a moment, please. I'll connect you with the president's office . . . Personnel Incorporated. Chrysler

Corporation? That's the automotive division, extension 2214 . . . Personnel Incorporated. Shanghai Importing Company? I believe our sales division can furnish you with the men, extension 230."

She turned to the small man. "The monster's office is that glass enclosure down there"—she pointed to a glassed-in office at the end of the room—"and while there, tell him he'll have to get some more help for the switchboard." She mopped her forehead with a soggy handkerchief. "It's more than we can handle."

The center of the whirlpool was the glassed-in office, with the name WHITEFORD on the door—nothing else. Whiteford himself, neatly dressed in a business suit with creases sharp enough to shave with, was sitting behind half an acre of mahogany desk. He was young, about 30, with the healthy and slightly overfed look of a graduated college halfback. Maxwell decided he didn't like him. He looked like a character who exuded confidence like perspiration.

Whiteford didn't bother looking up but continued barking into the intercom.

"Lyons? About the Amazon Valley deal. Fly in three thousand semi-skilled next week. Get 'em housed in quonset huts and make arrangements with a coast concern for shipments of fresh fruits and

vegetables for the central kitchen." He paused. "Better call in the bug experts to liquidate the mosquitoes instead of spending the money for netting and anti-malaria. Cheaper in the long run."

He took time out to gulp some pills from a bottle and wash them down with water from a desk side tap. "Just a quick lunch," he apologized. His voice was brisk. "What can I do for you?"

The small man gestured to himself and his companion. "I'm George Burger, director of the experimental division at Atlantic Motors. And this is Frank Maxwell; he's with the government. We have something important we'd like to discuss . . ."

"Be glad to,"—Whiteford looked at his watch—"for about four minutes. I have an engagement at eleven. As you were saying, Mister Bircher?"

The small man winced. "Burger. We need . . ."

A secretary came in on the run. "Call for you from London, Mr. Whiteford! About dredging the Thames . . ."

" . . . a man . . ."

"I'll take it out there in a moment. Miss Hancock."

" . . . to pilot . . ."

The phone rang.

" . . . a rocket . . ."

"IBM? Call me back in half an hour."

"... to the ..."

Whiteford flipped the intercom switch.

"Tell the man from General Motors we'll be able to supply the gear specialists, Miss Hancock."

"... moon."

Whiteford glanced at his watch again and frowned.

"Really, Burger, I'm a very busy man. You'll have to cut it short."

Maxwell shouldered past Burger and leaned possessively on Whiteford's desk, his jaw an inch from Whiteford's own.

"It so happens that what concerns Atlantic Motors vitally concerns the government, Whiteford! We'd appreciate it if you could stretch that generosity of yours and give us five minutes of your undivided attention. After all, we *did* have an appointment!"

WHITEFORD turned off the intercom and leaned back in his swivel chair, his fingers tapping nervously on the chair arm.

"Sorry Maxwell, but keeping the organization running keeps me on the hump."

"Like it kept the slavers of the eighteenth century on the hump," Maxwell growled.

Whiteford's eyebrows shot up.

"Personnel Incorporated was founded on one of the most obvious needs of our civilization, Maxwell!

With the expansion of production after the first atomic war, the demand for personnel, and increasing labor-management difficulties, it was obvious that dozens of little employment agencies and company employment divisions were only hampering manufacturing facilities. A single, centralized bureau was needed. Personnel Incorporated filled that need. From myself on down, everybody who's been handled by Personnel has been psychologically tested for their job—which means strikes and walkouts have been cut to a minimum.

"Modern civilization would be impossible without Personnel, Maxwell! But that's water over the dam." He nodded to Burger. "You have a personnel problem?"

"That's why I came here," Burger said testily. "As you may know, Mr. Whiteford, Atlantic Motors has constructed a rocket to make the first flight to the moon. We need a pilot for that rocket."

Whiteford looked bored. "All the Sunday supplements have carried articles about the A-M rocket. As for the pilot, there are thousands of men in this country alone who are probably qualified for the job. To find one would be routine, I should think."

"It's somewhat more complicated than picking a pilot out of a hat, Mr. Whiteford. Not just any pilot will do. There are, of course, cer-

tain technical qualifications but there are more important ones than that. Our man would have to be perfect mentally—no nervousness, neurosis, streaks of instability or anything of the sort. We could hardly trust 75,000,000 dollars worth of rocket to a man who wasn't sound physically and mentally."

"I take it you couldn't find any?"

Burger shook his head.

"Where does the government come in?"

"The government is naturally interested in rockets," Maxwell said. "It's rumored the Russians aren't far behind us. At any rate, without a pilot, the rocket is useless."

"And the government has been unsuccessful, too?"

Maxwell hesitated. "As a matter of fact we found a pilot—at least we thought we had. He piloted the first rocket that was sent—one flight has been attempted before. From what little evidence we can gather, it appears he deliberately crashed the rocket on the moon."

"Why?"

Maxwell shrugged. "Off his trolley, I suppose. That's reason number one for our qualifications being so high."

"I frankly don't think you can find one," Burger added nastily. "Atlantic Motors has tried for months with no success."

"Personnel Incorporated is not

Atlantic Motors, Burger," Whiteford said sarcastically. "We've never failed! *Never* failed!" He repeated it like a liturgy. "We don't intend to fail now. Come back in a week and we'll have your man."

"Just like the Royal Canadian Mounted," Maxwell muttered.

When they had gone, Whiteford flipped the switch of the intercom.

"Miss Hancock? Cancel my appointment with the directors of AT&T. Call in the company psychologists to prepare a personnel test. Contact Haskins at our London office and Schubert in Paris and tell them we intend to launch a campaign for rocket pilots immediately. Examination papers for applicants will be forwarded at once. Notify our other branch offices to the same effect. All on the QT, you understand. And Miss Hancock—have the psychologists test our advertising for confidence appeal. A representative of Atlantic Motors just implied we couldn't supply them with help!"

"THOSE cards represent exactly 250,342 applicants," Whiteford said proudly, gesturing to stacks of tabulating cards by the sorting machine. Burger looked mildly surprised. "All of them qualified to be the pilot?"

Whiteford smiled indulgently. "Probably only a small propor-

tion—several thousand or so. Each hole punched in the card represents either the applicant's physical condition, his technical knowledge, or answers to carefully phrased questions which will reveal his mental state. The sorting machine here,"—he patted the mechanical monster at his side—"has been set to sort out only those cards that meet with the qualifications the company psychologists have set up.

"I've arranged this demonstration to show the efficiency of the corporation; we have quite a reputation for fulfilling contracts." He shot a glance at Burger. "We'll run through this large stack here—applicants from England—first."

Maxwell pointed curiously to a small pile. "Where's that stack from?"

Whiteford glanced at it casually. "That stack was forwarded from our branch office in Hindustan. Some Indians make darn good pilot material."

He inserted part of the stack of cards from England into the chute of the machine and started it up. There was a slow snick-snick-snick as the cards passed through the intricate system of metal "fingers" that would separate the sheep from the goats—or, in this case, the pilots from the remainder of the applicants.

The chute emptied and no cards

had been tossed out into the acceptance hopper.

"No luck, eh?" Maxwell couldn't help grinning.

Whiteford frowned. "We've just started."

Two hours later the entire stack of cards—including the stack from Hindustan—had been run through.

The acceptance hopper was still empty.

Whiteford was in his shirt sleeves, beads of sweat dripping unnoticed off the tip of his nose.

"I can't understand," he muttered. "I can't believe . . . Miss Hancock! Call in Dr. Burroughs!"

When the doctor had showed up, Whiteford pointed to the cards lying in heaps on the floor.

"Not a one qualified—not a single one! Why, Burroughs?"

Burroughs hemmed and hawed and finally decided to risk it. "Well, that's ah—not too hard to understand. Unfortunately the majority of applicants were nothing more than—if you'll pardon me—crackpots. The kind who will volunteer for anything. Most of them lacked the technical knowledge. Those who had it either failed the physical or were again, mentally unstable. Only slightly, in most cases, but enough so there was a danger of it becoming pronounced while in the rocket. Those who might've qualified weren't interested."

"Why not? The pay was good."

"Let me pose a question. What *entirely* sane man would volunteer, for any amount of money, to pilot a plutonium engine rocket around the moon and back?"

Whiteford looked blank.

"In other words—personnel can't supply the man. Is that it?" Maxwell interrupted.

Burroughs spread his hands in an expansive gesture. "Well, now, I wouldn't say that. Someplace there must be a man. . ."

Whiteford turned and went into his office, slamming the door behind him. They could see him collapse into his swivel chair.

"Well, what do you suppose came over him?" Burger gasped.

"I suspect that God has finally found a stone he couldn't lift," Maxwell murmured.

WHITEFORD kneaded his knuckles and stared morosely out the window. From time to time his hand strayed to the intercom and then he'd snap it back.

He'd been sitting that way for two hours. For two hours the gigantic cogs of Personnel Incorporated had been stopped by a grain of sand. Or at least, so it seemed.

Suddenly his hand lashed out and he flipped the intercom switch.

"Would you please come here a minute, Miss Hancock?"

"Y-yes, Mr. Whiteford?"

"Do you think you could run Personnel Incorporated while I'm away?"

"Well—I don't—I hardly think I'm capable . . ."

"You're not," Whiteford said drily. "But you're more capable than anyone else that's here. You'll assume my duties until I return."

He paused at the door.

"In case anyone asks, I'll be gone for a month."

* * *

Burger wrung his hands nervously. "Only a half hour until take-off time, Mr. Whiteford. I think we've thought of everything. You realize that your position on the rocket, actually, is only the safety factor of the rocket itself. And, of course, an observer is preferable. First hand accounts of human reactions on board the rocket will be invaluable. You've been drilled for two weeks in your duties on board, the listing of meter readings in the log book, a careful diary of your own physiological reactions, etc. And naturally, what to do in case of an emergency. Of course, the chances are several million to one of anything actually going wrong with the rocket.

"Oh yes, the pictures of the first rocket flight. The film actually doesn't show much but it might be of interest."

Whiteford followed him to the small projection room.

"The camera was tracked by radar," Burger exclaimed. "We can follow the rocket all the way. I'll speed up the action a little." The pin-point of light on the screen leaped ahead and in a few moments the pock-marked face of the moon came into view. Burger slowed the action down to normal. The tiny tad-pole of light swam closer to the moon. Suddenly it swerved and in a moment there was a tiny burst of light on one of the craters and the screen went blank.

"The crash, eh?"

Burger nodded. "You can still back out, you know. You can up until the moment you step inside the rocket."

"Don't be silly!" Whiteford snorted.

They went out to the landing field.

"Incidentally, Mr. Whiteford, you'll find a small cabinet on board with various books, puzzles, and what-not for your leisure hours. They've been scientifically selected for your type of personality." Burger smiled faintly. "In fact, you'll discover that the pilot has been provided for very well, considering weight limitations and all. Practically every possible occurrence has been provided for. I'm sure you'll experience no difficulty on the flight."

Whiteford nodded absently. "Just be sure and tell Maxwell

that Personnel Incorporated can always supply the man! Always!"

INSIDE the cabin, Whiteford methodically went through the take-off preparations he had practiced during the previous two weeks. He gave the chronometer, synchronized to start with the take-off, a quick inspection and turned to the meters on the instrument panel. He quickly went over the small control board that would permit him to make deviations and corrections in the ship's course of as much as five degrees and checked the geiger counter apparatus which emitted a faint burp as a stray cosmic ray hit it. The Counter was designed to warn against stray radiation from the engines (but the chances were ten million to one that there would be any, Burger had said). He flicked through the pages of the ship's log and idly noted the entry pages for meter readings and observations.

Against the rear bulkhead of the small cabin was a hammock-like affair, suspended by coil springs. He punched the hammock casually. It would serve to cushion the effects of acceleration at the take-off and as a bunk for the pilot the rest of the trip. Near it and almost a part of the deck was a food locker. There was a small spigot at the top that served as a water tap for the tank below.

Around the top of the cabin there was a series of small ports of steel-strong plastic, permitting an outside view. The ports were currently closed with steel over-lap caps.

He looked down at his watch. Two minutes until take-off. He strapped himself in the hammock and bounced once or twice to test the springs. They hardly gave at all under his efforts; they were designed to give way under the acceleration of 8 or 9 g's. The hammock and the skin tight pilot suit were supposed to keep him together under the crushing weight of acceleration, at which time he'd be like jelly in a mould.

A light sweat sprung out on his forehead. If something went wrong with the apparatus, they could scrape him off the rear bulkhead like a pancake off a hot griddle. He hadn't thought of that before. Not only that but how about radiation from the engines? Shielded, of course, but even the best engineers could sometimes . . . Good God, how did he ever get . . .

There was a sudden surge of the ship and the springs holding the hammock stretched as easy as a dime store rubber-band. He felt his weight double and treble. His breath came in tight little gasps as if a sorting machine had been dumped on his chest. The weight kept increasing and the cabin start-

ed to spin. Little black dots danced around the edges of his area of vision and gradually covered it. He felt he was smothering in a dark, black pit. . .

Maxwell's face flashed at him out of the darkness. "Always supply the man, eh?" it sneered. Hands appeared before the face and dropped application cards until they fluttered in front of it like snow. The snow cleared and he could see prim Miss Hancock coming toward him, a suddenly alluring Miss Hancock sans glasses and most everything else. He had a faint impression of being shocked. The image faded and he saw himself being chased down the boulevard by a group of animated tabulating machines. He made it to the Personnel building and made a dash for the elevator. Instead of going up, the elevator went down, faster, faster . . . He felt the bottom of the elevator drop away from under him and he floated in the air, vainly kicking at the walls. . . .

Whiteford opened his eyes slowly. The hammock quivered a little on the springs but they were no longer stretched. The chronometer read five minutes since takeoff.

HE unstrapped and tried to get out of the hammock. An instant later he found himself floating at about the same level as the hammock, not touching the deck. A

fragment of a dream about an elevator touched his mind and it suddenly occurred to him that he was falling—falling faster than he had fallen before. He closed his eyes, which promptly made it worse. He was falling—falling hundreds of miles to earth. An image formed in his mind of the ship entering the atmosphere, the screaming of the tortured air, the heating of the metallic shell from friction until it glowed a cherry red, roasting its occupant to a blackened cinder.

He screamed and the sound of his own voice brought him back to sanity. The sensation of falling was what he should expect from weightlessness. It was like being in the elevator he had imagined that kept going faster and faster until it fell away from beneath him. He kept his mind on the concept with an effort.

He managed to control his imagination but his nervous system kept sending the impulses which screamed that he was falling. He clutched at the hammock in a sudden wave of nausea. The feeling didn't leave him and he closed his eyes and vomited. It was amazingly easy to do—in free flight gravity no longer helped in holding down his meal.

He was in the middle of an agonizing attack of what any sailor would recognize as the "dry heaves" before he managed to gain control

of his knotted stomach muscles.

The hammock served as a point of orientation and he dragged himself on to it and buried his face in the canvas. He tried not to feel anything or hear anything or think anything. He had lain like that for a long time when he felt something brush his face.

He opened his eyes and saw a few little spheroids of matter floating in the cabin. He batted idly at one with a free hand and it immediately broke up into smaller spheroids which drifted apart from each other.

He groaned. It had been a mistake to vomit. Whether he liked it or not, his next duty would have to be to gather up all the spheroids and stuff them into the disposal chute. He found a rubberized bag in the medicine kit and went after the spheroids much in the same way a little boy catches butterflies.

When he had finished the unpleasant task of collecting the spheroids, he glanced over at the chronometer. It read some fifty minutes since the beginning of the trip. Time to begin his tour of duty. He took the log book and made his round of the meters and jotted down their readings. Under *Personal Reactions* he jotted down *sick; steady and unremitting feeling of nausea.*

Ten minutes later he had accomplished his duties for the next eight

hour period. That left only—well, fourteen days going, same time returning. He had left only twenty-seven days and twenty-three hours before he'd see earth again.

Twenty-seven days and twenty-three hours of sheer hell.

Things — unpleasant things—seemed to pile up on him. He had suffered from migraine headaches before— but nothing like he did now. It was easier for his heart to pump blood to his head, and the minute enlargement of the blood vessels in his head caused splitting pains to shoot through it. He had noticed the headaches shortly after he had attempted to look through one of the ports. Not that they weren't there before—he had been too busy vomiting to take note of them. The ports were a fiasco in themselves. The practically solid beams of light coming through had blinded him temporarily, even when he wore sun-glasses; enough to show him that sight-seeing and human observation were out of the question.

And mixed in with all of these were the difficulties of getting around the small compartment. He could kick himself around, inasmuch as he was weightless in free flight, but the piping and equipment in the compartment turned it into a hazardous obstacle course. He nearly broke his arm, once, trying to stop from running into a

bulkhead.

And there were other things. Embarrassing things. Or, considering he was alone in the compartment, just mildly annoying things.

After trying to look through the ports, he pushed back to the hammock and lay down. He could just as easily have rested floating in the air but the hammock was a great mental aid. He tried to keep his mind blank but snatches of thought kept running through it. Today was Friday on earth. About time for the evening meal. Fried perch and scalloped potatoes . . .

He groaned again. Nowhere on the examinations they had made out for the applicants was there a question asking if the prospect was susceptible to space-sickness.

WHITEFORD lay on the hammock and thought about what it had been like on earth a few hours before. It would be near quitting time and the five o'clock rush just beginning. Most people would be going home to a hearty dinner—he skipped that—and then a quiet evening with the television, or perhaps a ringside table at any of the local night spots where he used to entertain clients. There would be the many little tables with the clean, white tablecloths and the neat arrangement of polished silver, the glasses filled to the brim with sparkling clear water . . .

He rolled his tongue around the inside of his mouth. It felt like fur. Sparkling clear water might be just what he needed. A few sips of ice water and a cold, wet-rag on his face would work wonders. Clear, cool, gushing, water . . .

He had to have water! He rolled out of the hammock and dove for the water tap. A split second later he remembered his first accident and twisted frantically in the air, trying to slow his momentum. He grabbed for some pipes that threaded through the cabin, missed, and hit the water tap butt first: the plastic panels at the front splintered and broke and the tiny aluminum tubing, scientifically designed to deliver water under conditions of free flight bent and crumpled.

Whiteford felt wet. He turned and grimly surveyed the demolished water tap. A few drops of water floated lazily, tantalizingly in the air. He *had* to have water! A kit near the food locker yielded some cooking utensils and an old-fashioned can-opener, one end of which might serve as a crude lever. He had to wedge himself between the tap and the bulkhead to get leverage to pry with; otherwise, a hearty twist only resulted in his body turning a slow circle in the air.

The tubes didn't straighten very easily. Finally, the can-opener broke; a loss that didn't become

immediately apparent. He grabbed the pipes with his hands and heaved outward. They bent. He heaved again and they bent still more. On the third heave he felt a slight pain in his side. He was exerting quite a bit of effort—effort which on earth would have made him sweat and his heart pump faster. He was sweating now but his heart wasn't only pumping faster, it was racing.

HE grasped the pipes harder for a final effort. With a brittle snap, one of the connections burst and a few drops of water sprayed out at him. He didn't notice. He was holding his sides in pain while his heart took off like a race horse. The veins in his wrist swelled to the size of lead pencils and he could feel the throbbing pulse of blood. He floated stiffly in the air, half paralyzed by sudden fear.

When the pumping had slowed down he turned his attention back to the battered pipes. He straightened one of them out—being careful not to over-exert himself—and used it to suck the water through. The water was clear and cold but tasted a little of metal. It refreshed him and he began to think of something to go with it. Whether he felt like eating or not, it was obviously going to be necessary.

It wasn't—too bad—so far. He could take the headaches and the nausea if he had to. There were—

other things, though. Fear of what might happen. Meteorites, for one thing. Chances of his ship colliding with a speck of dust were ten million to one against it. But still . . .

He went to the food locker and broke out a small electric hot-plate, a skillet, and a dozen eggs. The skillet was a little flatter than an ordinary one with a hinged cover to keep the contents in.

It wasn't pleasant to think about . . . The ship a drifting derelict, riddled and airless, with his body frozen as hard as stone floating on the inside. What rubbish! Let's see, a one kilogram meteorite with a velocity of ten miles a second hitting the hull . . . probably fuse a section of it. Ten miles . . . sixteen kilometers a second, approximately . . .

Five minutes later, he was trying to coax an egg, floating sedately in mid-air, into it. He'd have the affair around it, hurriedly close the lid, and watch the air forced out from between the skillet and the lid push the egg away.

A one kilogram meteorite at that speed could fuse about fifteen kilograms of hull . . . about thirty-three pounds, enough to . . .

The trick was to close the lid slowly. With that accomplished he discovered that grease wouldn't stay in the bottom of the skillet. Finally he filled the skillet with water and poached the egg.

. . . vaporize a section of the hull big enough so he could poke his fist through it . . . with a velocity of a hundred miles a second there probably wouldn't be enough left of the ship to identify . . .

He dumped the egg into the disposal chute. He had lost his appetite.

* * *

Read the meters, list the readings in the log book. Note any changes between consecutive readings. Test the air, note the humidity. Read the meters, list the readings in the log book. Note the—oh hell, he knew the order by heart as it was. Under *Personal Reaction* he wrote: *damn sick and tired of it. Ten days to go before halfway mark.*

HE flipped the switch that cut the light circuit and floated lazily in the dark. It was peaceful and quiet and his eyes closed in sleep.

Tick . . . tick . . . tick . . .

He jerked awake. What the hell!

Tick . . . tick . . . tick . . . tick!

It sounded a little faster now.

Tick-tick-tick-tick!

The ticking swelled to a roar and then subsided to a gentle, purring *tick . . . tick . . . tick!*

He crouched there in the dark, straining for the sound, wondering what it was. It almost sounded like a slow-motion tabulator . . .

The geiger counter!

His heart skipped and a cold sweat broke out on his skin. There was a counter on board to warn against stray radiation. Not that there would be any — the Cameron-Smith energy converters were shielded so thoroughly that not even a single stray particle could get through.

They were supposed to be, that is. Was it possible that the engineers could have slipped up?

Pictures of the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, hideous with radiation keloids, flashed into his mind. A news story about radiation poisoning gibbered in the back of his imagination.

Tick-tick-tick-tick!

Sterility . . .

He flipped the light switch and floated over to the counter readings on the instrument panel. The row of tiny lights flashed rapidly in succession and the counter added another digit.

Stray radiation . . . stray . . . It came to him, then. For a moment he had forgotten that the counter was apt to read high, due to the increase in cosmic ray radiation once outside the atmosphere of the earth. He laughed weakly. What a thing to forget!

Something snickered in the back of his mind. *Yeah, what a thing to forget! And how will you tell whether the counter is reading stray radiation from the converters or the*

increase in cosmic rays? The engineers never make mistakes, though. Never? Well, hardly ever!

The question of adequate shielding of the converters haunted him continuously.

BY the sixth day out, Whiteford had become accustomed to the life in the cabin. He took it easy getting about and kept up with the business of the ship. By splitting the "day" into segments, as on earth, he managed to keep up a fairly normal routine. Sixteen hours on duty and about eight for sleeping, although sleeping wasn't too easy. He was rarely physically tired and made the mistake of trying to force himself to sleep. By the sixth "evening" he had developed into a first rate insomniac.

And by the sixth evening he was aware that the job of pilot was one of sheer boredom. It was dull routine with nothing to break the monotony but worry. There was no radio, no television, no telephone to shatter the silence. The first day or so he had whistled and sung to himself; now he hated the sound of his own voice.

He floated disgustedly in the hammock. He had read the meters, he had listed the readings in the log book. He had noted the changes between consecutive readings. He had tested the air and noted the humidity; he had listed his own

physiological reactions from acne to watering eyes. He had cleaned and loaded the automatic cameras. All of which took about one hour out of every twenty-four.

He threaded his way over to the locker containing the books and games Burger had mentioned. Odd that he hadn't thought of it before.

This was more like it. Everything was designed to appeal to the businessminded type of man, which was all to the good. He picked up the thin books, printed on india paper to conserve weight, and frowned. One of them was almost a text on finance; ordinarily, if he could have curled up in an easy chair with nothing around to bother him, he'd be interested. The other book he had read before. That left one—and fifteen minutes later he discovered that he couldn't concentrate. His eyes bothered him and the type blurred; he was a little too sick to drum up interest in a book.

He went back to the cabinet and got out a popular parlor game. It was designed so that one person could play at it. The game itself was simple; based on a combination of finance and mathematics the object was to corner all the real estate on the board and "break the bank." It provided an hour of amusement. After that he discovered he always won; the board was *too* simple—he had memorized the exact sequence of moves to win the

game every time. The remaining game was a complicated three-dimensional chess set. This he discarded even sooner. He couldn't win at all.

He fell back on a deck of cards and tried to play solitaire but the cards were too slick and their weight wouldn't hold them down anymore. He would manage to arrange them in neat rows and then accidentally jar them and they would go skitting off through the cabin. He finally tore the pack in two with disgust and spent the rest of the day picking up the pieces from the various corners where he had thrown them.

His nerves were fraying rapidly. He couldn't shave and he couldn't shower. The air was dry—a little too dry—and he began to itch, a vague, annoying sensation that shifted over his body.

And the cabin smelled. The air purifiers worked to satisfaction as far as the meters were concerned but the odor of unwashed humanity still clung to the cabin. He had a hunch it would get worse as time went on.

He no longer bothered to prepare full meals for himself. He was too tired, he didn't want to go to the effort, he didn't feel hungry anyways. He ended up by nibbling on cold meats and bread at idle moments. With the change in diet, his face broke out in large, ugly

splotches that bothered him considerably. Among other things, the diet he had been originally supplied with had been designed to avoid just that. If he had kept on the original diet . . . if he had the energy to prepare a full meal . . . if he didn't feel so damned sick . . . if only that had been taken into consideration!

The steady, irritating ticking of the geiger counter worried him constantly. He could never be sure that the ticking was entirely innocent; he grew to have a superstitious dread of the rear bulkhead that stood between the cabin and converters. He unconsciously avoided it, keeping to the front of the cabin as much as possible.

Little noises startled him. If an occasional drop of water happened to collide with him in the cabin, it sent him into a raving fury—blood pressure be damned. He even derived a certain grim amusement from it, thinking of the times he had laughed at the typical picture of the apoplectic businessman.

ON the eighth day, when making the check of the instrument panel, he noticed that the panel on the board reading "Manual Control" was lit; the one marked "Automatic" was out. In the middle of the board was the face of an oscilloscope with two hair lines intersecting at the middle. A small red

dot, representing the rocket, should have been set exactly at the intersection.

It wasn't. It was at the bottom of the 'scope, almost off the face altogether.

To hell with all engineers, he snarled to himself.

He would have to jockey the dot back to the center before the automatic controls would take over again. If he failed, the rocket would be hopelessly off course, a tiny wanderer in space. The auxiliary chemical rockets, allowing for two degree corrections in the line of flight, would have to be used. They consisted of four sets at right angles to each other around the hull. By jockeying between them, he should be able to work the ship back.

He pressed the key for firing the portside jets. The next moment he felt himself hurled from his position and thrown against the left-hand bulkhead. The cabin exploded into a pinwheel of stars that quickly faded into blackness.

* * *

His head hurt and something that felt very much like oozing blood was sticking his eyelids together. He wrenched them open and rubbed his head with his hands, then wiped the stickiness off on the pilot suit. It *was* blood, flowing from a cut in his scalp. Judging from the cabin, he had lost quite

a bit. But the cut was of secondary importance.

He clawed his way back to the oscilloscope. The spot on the face had moved way over to the other side of the scope. He braced himself into position so that the sudden acceleration wouldn't affect him again. He pressed the key very lightly again and waited for the dot to shift. Sweat collected on his nose and stayed there. He shook his head and a spatter of drops flew off.

The dot on the scope shifted—too much. He felt weak. This was going to be a precision job; the slightest pressure on the firing stud might prove to be too much again. He'd have to jockey it back and forth until, by sheer luck, he hit the center of the scope. He could do it—but it would take time.

Five hours later a worn out, nervous Whiteford left the control panel and drifted wearily over to the hammock. He was dead tired—so tired he couldn't sleep.

IT was the thirteenth day out.

A floating drop of water brushed lightly past Whiteford. He batted at it, swore, and began to cry; a peculiar sobbing that shook his whole body. He blubbered for ten minutes.

He was sick and hungry. The cut on his head begun to fester and

his whole head throbbed with pain. There was a first aid kit in the cabin but he felt too weak to get it. His beard itched and his body felt slimy; sweat didn't drop off but stuck and spread over his skin until it formed a thin coating.

Just a poor little lamb who is lost in space, ha—ha—ha!

The tune slipped into his mind and at the end he laughed with the chorus. He couldn't stop laughing. It built up to a hysterical roar that left him shaking silently in the hammock.

Oh, Whiteford had a spaceship, its hull as white as snow; but every time he pressed the stud, the ship refused to go!

That was hilariously funny, too.

He was sick, he was tired, he was dirty. He hadn't had enough energy or ambition to fill in the log books for the last two days.

Besides, who gave a damn?

He was just the stupid jerk who piloted the thing. What did it matter if he got killed in the attempt.

My rocket started out for the star-speckled void, my rocket started out in great haste; but the g's were far too many for me, and I stuck to the bulkhead like paste!

Burger and Maxwell had sent a rocket as far as the moon, hadn't they?

He was sick—he didn't care whether he lived or died.

He was a sucker. A dope. A sick

dope who wished to hell it was all over.

The moon was close now. If he waited until he got just a little closer and then pressed the port-side firing stud, he could wreck their blessed rocket. Serve Burger and Maxwell right. As for himself, he was so sick of the whole thing that death would come as a relief.

That's what he'd do . . .

My bonny, my bonny, my bonny so true, do you think you will miss me if I die in the blue?

C day for Crack-up day! He put his thumb on the key and allowed himself five extra seconds of gloating. The company would have a tough time sending a wreath to his funeral. The company . . .

Who in hell would run Personnel Incorporated if he failed to return? He nodded his head thoughtfully, faintly surprised that he hadn't thought of it before.

Who *would* run the company? He was the only one who knew how. He *was* the company. He had practically raised it all by himself to where it was now.

He took his thumb off the key.

And what would happen to the company's reputation if he failed to come back? That meant that their slogan no longer held—that they hadn't found the man for the job. And he hadn't kidded about the mottos. They had been capable of finding a man to do any job—

even this one. Not just to go out on a job. To *do* a job.

He had a sudden vision of Maxwell shouting gleefully: "I told you so! Personnel can't supply the man!"

Five minutes later he hardly remembered his desire to crash the ship. He thought fleetingly of the movies showing the crack-up of the first ship. Something pretty much the same as had happened to him must have happened to the pilot on the first flight.

He shuddered and kicked his way over to the first-aid kit.

THE next day the ship began the long smooth curve that would carry it around the moon and on the last leg of the journey. Whiteford went to the panel board and pressed the key releasing the steel porthole caps. He pressed the key again and when they still didn't move realized they were stuck. It wouldn't be hard to find the trouble but . . .

It wasn't worth the effort. He didn't give a damn whether he saw the moon or not.

He drifted back to the hammock and went into an almost coma state staring dully at the overhead. He lay that way until time came for his next round of readings.

* * *

Two thousand miles out from earth the ship started the first of a

dozen trips around the earth that would slow it down for a landing. Five hundred miles up the ship entered the first tenuous wisps of atmosphere. A hundred miles up, the air was screaming past the ship and the hull begun to get warm. Ten miles up Whiteford jettisoned the rocket tubes and engine over the Atlantic ocean. At the same time he released the double duty nylon parachute attached to the cabin.

Inside, Whiteford had begun to experience discomfort as his weight returned. It was an effort to move around and his heart beat seemed sluggish. His stomach sagged heavily and he thought wistfully of a gentleman's girdle. Water bubbled merrily from the broken water pipes and splashed unheeded on the deck.

The cabin thudded on something soft and Whiteford crawled to the hatch and opened it. The ship was floating on a large body of water. Waves slapped cheerfully against the hull and overhead a few startled gulls cawed angrily. A cool gust of fresh air blew in. Whiteford hauled himself erect and stripped off the pilot suit. He stood nude in the opening, inhaling the air in greedy gulps. It smelled as clean and cool as the conditioned air in his office at Personnel Incorporated.

* * *

"Ahoy, there!"

There was a boat a few feet from the hatch.

"Coming aboard!" They drifted closer and one of the men in the boat grabbed the ladder by the hatchway. Five men and a woman tumbled aboard.

"The Coast Guard at your . . ."

"I'm from the Daily Newsworld, Mr. Whiteford. I wonder . . ."

"What was it like in space. . ."

"You must have been simply *thrilllled* . . ."

Burger's bald head pushed itself forward. "How did the moon look to you, Mr. Whiteford?"

Whiteford had to think a little. "Come to think of it, I never saw it."

There was a dead silence.

"Oh, it's all on the films the automatic cameras shot. I wasn't too much interested myself."

The reporters frowned in disappointment but tried again.

"What do you intend to do now that you're back? Do the town, go on a fishing trip . . ."

Whiteford looked at them as if they had crawled out from under a rock. "Nonsense!" he snarled. "I'll get back to my office, of course!"

MAXWELL looked at the president of Personnel approvingly. "I honestly didn't think you could do it, once I heard that you had gone." He paused and fumbled

with his pipe. "Pretty tough, wasn't it?"

Whiteford knocked the ash off his cigarette and reached for the bottle of pills on his desk. "I wouldn't say so," he said expansively. "Just a matter of being fitted for the job."

Maxwell inspected his fingernails. "You didn't take the examinations your own outfit rigged up. Any particular reason?"

Whiteford looked annoyed. "I was technically qualified—engineering course in college. As for the rest, I successfully piloted the ship which should establish something on that score."

Maxwell twirled his hat self-consciously. A half smile played on his lips. "Oh, sure. Absolutely." He tamped his pipe. "You know, it's hard to visualize anybody wanting to go to the moon. It must be—well, some terrific drive that makes them do it."

Whiteford stared at him suspiciously. "What are you getting at?"

Maxwell looked innocent and gave exaggerated shrug. "Why, nothing! Nothing at all. It's just that it seems . . . seems so unusual that you couldn't find a qualified man, a completely *normal* man who wanted to go!"

The temperature in the room dropped thirty degrees. "Implying,"

Whiteford said icily, "that I'm not quite sane?"

Maxwell stood up and chuckled. "Exactly, Hasn't it occurred to you that the qualifications you set up for a pilot were all wrong? When has a *completely* normal man ever succeeded at *anything* that was a little difficult? Why did you succeed? Because you're just a shade neurotic, because you've got a streak of monomania in you. It's what built up Personnel Incorporated. It's what got you to the moon and back. Hell, Whiteford, after this when we want pilots we'll just run your characteristics on the sorter and pick them out that way!"

Whiteford glared at him and for a moment Maxwell felt sorry. He had pushed a big man off a pedestal; he had punctured an ego.

Suddenly Whiteford grinned self-consciously. "Maybe you've got a point there. I never thought of it that way."

Maxwell started for the door and paused, his hand on the knob. The look he gave Whiteford was one of sudden admiration.

"There's something else, too. Something that it takes to send a man to the moon and back and something you can't measure on an IBM machine." He paused. "It takes courage, A hell of a lot of it."

★ *Cars Of The Future* ★

Aside from the minor styling changes one sees in the automobiles of the present, definite trends can be detected in automobile design. Perhaps the most obvious simply is in public attitude. More and more cars are regarded simply as transport machines. With increasing numbers of them, this attitude will strengthen and the object of engineers will be to make them more efficient than ever.

Increased power, the use of power on accessory devices, steering, brakes, and the like—these im-

provements will be re-inforced and balanced by almost automatic maintenance. Already one manufacturer is offering an automatic chassis lubrication system as an extra!

The sealed engine of the future is coming close. As engineers have learned to make more and more reliable machines, they have eliminated the need for adjustment and tampering. Soon one will simply order an "engine package" if trouble occurs. In styling itself no one can be safe in predicting this evanescent quality—but the cars will go!



"Mars is arid, he says . . . Mars has little water, he says . . . Mars is . . ."



Highways In Hiding

by

George O. Smith

Mekstrom's disease was a strangely fatal sickness, Cornell knew. But he also knew there were survivors — the nucleus of a superrace . . .

(Four Part Serial — Conclusion)

WHAT HAS GONE BEFORE

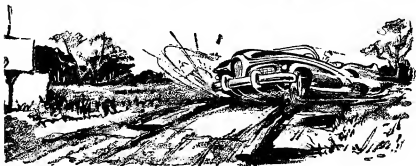
In Earth's future medical science has conquered most of mankind's ailments, except for an insidious new disease brought to Earth by one of the pioneering space flights. Mekstrom's Disease turns the body slowly to stone-like substance, its victims dying in agony finally when vital organs are reached.

Aided by psi powers of esper and

telepathy the Scholars of the Medical Center are seemingly endeavoring to solve this grim puzzle from outer space.

Steve Cornell, an esper, has been eloping with his fiancée, Catherine, a telepath, when they become involved in an accident. Waking up in a hospital Cornell is told he was alone in the car. Nothing he can say will convince anybody. He sets out to find his fiancée.

His quest leads him to the scene



of the accident near a strange highway sign he had being digging with psi power when the accident occurred. He meets the Harrison family—farmers—who pulled him from the wreck. They agree with the known evidence—he had been alone in the car.

Later when Cornell returns to the farm he finds the Harrisons—including their daughter Marian, gone, with no forwarding address. Also, the strange highway sign has been changed, a missing part replaced.

Sensing the sign ties in somehow, Cornell tours the midwest until he finds another sign similar to the one at the scene of the accident; it leads him to another farm where he meets a young girl whom he discovers has a body of steel-like substance. He realizes the girl is a walking Mekstrom Disease—but cured, and now a member of a new superrace. He theorizes the signs are pointers to an underground group of supermen, purpose unknown.

Visiting the Medical Center in search of information he meets Scholar Phelps, who politely tells him medical science cannot cure the disease; secretly, Cornell discovers Phelps himself is a Mekstrom!

Cornell then discovers the doctor who attended him earlier, Dr. Thorndyke, has vanished; realizing he must have assistance to track the puzzle down, Cornell teams up with his former Nurse, Gloria Farrow, a telepath. Shortly thereafter she vanishes too.

Cornell is becoming aware that he is now a pawn in some hidden struggle; there is an underground

he calls Highways In Hiding; there is the Medical Center. Both groups are Mekstrom supermen. Both apparently are using him for some unknown reason.

He sends a letter to the Harrisons and follows it to its destination using his esper power. He discovers Catherine is with them, a full Mekstrom. Marian Harrison explains they are all Mekstroms, trying to save as many victims as possible from falling into the hands of the Medical Center, which wants the super race to be selective in nature, while their group wants all mankind to have it. Cornell submits to experiments to see if he can catch the disease and then be cured into a superman. The experiment fails. Realizing he cannot lead a normal life with Catherine now, Steve quietly leaves. Angry, he vows to fight both groups who are using him, for still unexplained purpose.

Marian Harrison follows Steve and stops him, explaining he must be returned to her group. Shortly thereafter they become involved in a battle between two groups of Mekstroms, one from Highways, one from the Medical Center. Steve escapes but is arrested by police for traffic violations. In court he discovers he has finally contracted Mekstrom's Disease. Almost magically Dr. Thorndyke appears and whisks him off to the Medical Center.

Steve is told he can be saved if he'll adopt Scholar Phelps' philosophy of selected cures. In debating this philosophy, Steve discovers the reason he is important to both groups; he is a carrier of the disease, one of the few known such

types.

As a lever, Phelps and Thorndyke bring Catherine. Steve is shocked to see her in the Center, but knows now he'll play Phelps' rules.

Undergoing cure treatment, Steve is further amazed as Nurse Farrow appears; she shatters his picture of Catherine, explaining that Catherine has been a tool of Phelps all along; she had been planted as a romantic tie because Phelps knew he, Cornell, was a carrier of the disease.

Nurse Farrow also explains she has been in love with Thorndyke, but that Thorndyke and Catherine are in love. This leaves Farrow in an emotional vacuum. She now wants to help Steve escape, even though his treatment is not complete. If they can get to the Highways people in time he can still be saved from death. First they have to escape from the Center.

As a Nurse, Farrow manipulates an escape outside the building; they steal two cars and tear from the grounds, Farrow in the lead car; she smashes through an iron gate and into a guardhouse. The car is demolished. Then, as the armed guard comes running, Steve barrels his car forward.

CHAPTER XXI

MY car leaped forward and I headed along the outside road towards the nearby highway. Through the busted gate I roared, past the downed guard and the blown-to-hell guardhouse, past the wreck of Farrow's car.

But Nurse Farrow was not finished with this gambit yet. As I drew even with her, she pried herself out of the messy tangle and came across the field in a dead run—and how that girl could run! As fast as I was going, she caught up; as fast as it all happened I had too little time to slow me down before Nurse Farrow closed the intervening distance from her wreck to my car and had hooked her arm in through one open window.

My car lurched with the impact, but I fought the wheel straight again and Farrow snapped, "Keep going, Steve!"

I kept going; Farrow snaked herself inside and flopped into the seat beside me. "Now," she said, patting the dashboard of our car, "It's up to the both of us now! Don't talk, Steve. Just drive like crazy!"

"Where—?"

She laughed a weak little chuckle. "Anywhere— so long as it's a long long way from here."

I nodded and settled down to some fancy mile-getting. Farrow relaxed in the seat, opened the glove compartment and took out a first aid kit. It was only then I noticed that she was banged up quite a bit, for a Mekstrom. I'd not been too surprised when she emerged from the wreck; I'd become used to the idea of the inde-

structibility of the Mekstrom. I was a bit surprised at her being banged up; I'd become so used to their damage-proof hide that the idea of minor cuts, scars, mars, and abrasions hadn't occurred to me. Yes, that wreck would have killed any human; it would have mangled a normal man into an unrecognizable mess of hamburger. Yet I'd expected a Mekstrom to come through it unscathed.

On the other hand, the damage to Farrow's body was really minor. She bled from a long gash on her thigh, from a deep wound on her right arm, and from a myriad of little cuts on her face, neck, and shoulders.

So as I drove crazy-fast away from The Medical Center, Nurse Farrow relaxed in the seat and applied adhesive tape, compresses, and closed the long gashes with a batch of little skin clips in lieu of sutures. Then she lit two cigarettes and handed one of them to me. "Okay now, Steve," she said easily. "Let's drive a little less crazily."

I pulled the car down to a flat hundred and felt the strain go out of me.

"As I remember, there's one of the Highways not far from here—"

She shook her head. "No, Steve. We don't want the Highways In Hiding, either."

At a mere hundred per I could

let my esper do the road-sighting, so I looked over at her. She was half-smiling, but beneath the little smile was a firm look of self-confidence. "No," she said quietly, "We don't want the Highways, either. If we go there, Phelps and his outfit will turn heaven and earth to break it up, now that you've become so important. You forget that The Medical Center is still being run to look legal and aboveboard; while the Highways In Hiding are still in hiding. Phelps could make quite a bitter case out of their reluctance to come out into the open."

"Well, where do we go?" I asked.

"West," she said simply. "West, into New Mexico. To my home."

This sort of startled me. Somehow I'd not connected Farrow with any permanent home; as a nurse and later as one of the Medical Center nurses I'd come to think of her as having no permanent home of her own. Yet, like most of the rest of us, Nurse Farrow had been brought up in a home with a mother and a father and probably some sisters and brothers. Mine were dead and the original home disbanded, but there was no reason why I should think of everybody else in the same terms. After all, Catherine had had a mother and a father who'd come to see me after her disap-

pearance.

SO we went West, across Southern Illinois and over the big bridge at Saint Louis into Missouri and across Missouri and West, West, West. We parked nights in small motels and took turns sleeping with one of us always awake and alert with esper and telepath senses geared high for the first sight of any threat. We gave the Highways we came upon a wide berth; at no time did we come close to any of their way stations. In fact, we did not even stay on a Highway when heading in a direction opposite from the signs that pointed to the way station. We gave them a wide berth, too, just in case some of them might be on the Highway coming up in the opposite direction. It made our path crooked and much longer than it might have been if we'd strung a line and gone.

But eventually we ended up in a small town in New Mexico and at a small ranch house on the edge of the town.

It is nice to have parents; I missed my own deeply when I was reminded of the sweet wonder of having people just plain glad to see their children again, no matter what they'd done and under any circumstances— even bringing a semi-invalid into their home for

an extended course of treatment.

John Farrow was a tall man with gray at the temples and a pair of sharp blue eyes that missed nothing. He was a fair perceptive, native, that might have been quite proficient if he had taken the full psi course at some university. Mrs. Farrow was the kind of elderly woman that any man would like to have for a mother. She was sweet and gentle but there was neither foolish softness or fatuous nonsense about her. She was a telepath and she knew her way around and let people know that she knew what the score was. Farrow had a brother, James, who was not at home; he lived in town with his wife but came out to the old homestead about once every week on some errand or other.

Anyway, they took me in as though I'd come home with their daughter for sentimental reasons; Gloria Farrow sat with us in their living room and went through the whole story, interrupted now and then by a remark aimed at me. They inspected my hand and agreed that something must be done. They were extremely interested in the Mekstrom problem and were amazed at their daughter's feats of strength and endurance.

My hand, by this time, was beginning to throb again. The infec-

tion was heading on a fine start down the pinky and middle fingers; the ring finger was approaching the second joint to that point where the advance stopped long enough for the infection to become complete before it crossed the joint. The first waves of that particular pain were coming at intervals and I knew that within a few hours the pain would become waves of agony so deep that I would not be able to stand it.

Ultimately, Farrow got her brother James to come out from town with his tools, and between us all we rigged up a small manipulator for my hand. Farrow performed the medical operations from the kit in the back of the car we'd stolen. The Medical Center had all of their cars well stocked for emergency treatment, all they really lacked were the mechanical doodads necessary; apparently they felt that if they could get to some victim they could give him the medical treatment until they could deliver the victim to some place where the mechanical stuff was available. So at least we had the stuff we needed.

Then after they'd put my hand through the next phase, Nurse Farrow looked me over and gave the opinion that it was now really time for me to get the rest of the full treatment.

That evening I went to bed, to

be in bed for four solid months.

I'D like to be able to give a blow by blow description of those four solid months. Unfortunately, I was under dope so much of the time that I know all too little about it. It was not pleasant. My arm laid like a log from the Petrified Forest, strapped into the machine that moved the joints with regular motion, and with each motion starting a dart of fire and mangling pain up to the shoulder. Needles entered the veins at the elbow and the armpit, and from bottles suspended almost to the ceiling to provide a pressure-head, plasma and blood-sustenance was trickled in to keep the arm alive.

Dimly I recall having the other arm strapped down and the waves of pain that blasted at me from both sides. The only way I kept from going out of my mind with the pain was living from hypo to hypo and waiting for the blessed blackness that wiped out the agony; only to come out of it hours later with my infection advanced to another point of pain. When the infection reached my right shoulder, it stopped for a long time; the infection rose up my left arm and also stopped at the shoulder. I came out of the dope to find James and his father fitting one of the manipulators to my right leg and through

that I could feel the darting pains in my calf and thigh.

At those few times when my mind was clear enough to let me use my perception, I dug the room and found that I was lying in a veritable forest of bottles and rubber tubes and a swathe of bandages.

Utterly helpless, I vaguely knew that I was being cared for in every way. The periods of clarity were fewer, now, and shorter when they came. I awoke once to find my throat paralyzed, and again to find that my jaw, tongue, and lower face was a solid pincushion of darting needles of fire. Later, my ears reported not a sound, and even later still I awoke to find myself strapped into a portable resuscitator that moved my chest up and down with an inexorable force.

That's about all I know of it. When the smoke cleared away completely and the veil across my eyes was gone, it was Spring outside and I was a Mekstrom.

I sat up in bed.

It was morning, the sun was streaming brightly in the window and the fresh morning air of Spring stirred the curtains gently. It was quite warm and the smell that came in from the outside was alive with newborn greenery. It felt good just to be alive.

The hanging bottles and festoons of rubber hose were gone. The crude manipulators had been stowed somewhere and the bottles of medicine and stuff were missing from the bureau. There wasn't even a thermometer in a glass anywhere within the range of my vision, and frankly I was so glad to be alive again that I did not see any point to digging through the joint with my perception to find the location of the medical junk. Instead, I just wanted to get up and run.

I did take a swing at the clothes closet and found my stuff. Then I took a mild pass at the house, located the bathroom and also assured myself that no one was likely to interrupt me.

I was going to shave and shower and dress and go downstairs. I was just shrugging myself up and out of bed when Nurse Farrow came bustling up the stairs and into the room with no preamble.

"Hi!" I greeted her. "I was going to —"

"Surprise us," she said quickly. "I know. So I came up to see that you don't get into trouble."

"Trouble?" I asked, pausing on the edge of the bed.

"You're a Mekstrom, Steve," she told me unnecessarily. Then she caught my thought and went on: "It's necessary to remind you. You have to learn how to control

your strength, Steve."

I flexed my arms. They didn't feel any different. I pinched my muscle with my other hand and it pinched just as it always had. I took a deep breath and the air went in pleasantly and came out again.

"I don't feel any different," I told her.

She smiled and handed me a common wooden lead pencil. "Write your name," she directed.

"Think I'll have to learn all over?" I grinned. I took the pencil, put my fist down on the top of the bureau above a pad of paper and chuckled at Farrow. "Now, let's see, my first initial is the letter 'S' made by starting at the top and coming around in a sweeping, graceful curve like this—"

It didn't come around in any curve. As the lead point hit the paper it bore down in, flicked off the tip, and then crunched down, breaking off the point and splintering the thin, whittled wood for about an eighth of an inch. The fact that I could not control it bothered me inside and instinctively clutched at the shaft of the pencil. It cracked in three places in my hand; the top end with the eraser fell down over my wrist to the bureau top and rolled in a rapid rattle to the edge where it fell to the floor.

"See?" asked Farrow softly.

"But—?" I blundered uncertainly.

"Steve, your muscles and your nervous system have been stepped up proportionally. You've got to re-learn the coordination between the muscle-stimulus and the feedback information from the work you are doing."

I began to see what she meant. I remembered long years ago at school, when we'd been studying some of the new alloys and there had been a sample of a magnesium-lithium-something alloy that was machined into a smooth cylinder about four inches in diameter and a foot long. It looked like hard steel. People who picked it up for the first time invariably braced their muscles and set both hands on it. But it was so light that their initial efforts almost tossed the bar through the ceiling, and even long after we all knew, it was hard not to attack the bar without using the experience of our mind and sense that told us that any bar of metal *that* big had to be *that* heavy.

I went to a chair. Farrow said, "Be careful," and I was, but it was no trick at all to take the chair by one leg at the bottom and lift it chin high.

"Now, go take your shower," she told me. "But Steve, please be careful of the plumbing. You can

twist off the faucet handles, you know."

I nodded and turned to her, holding out a hand, "Farrow, you're a brick!"

She took my hand. It was not steel hard. It was warm and firm and pleasant. It was—like holding hands with a real woman. I drew forward and she came slowly; my hands slipped to either side of her slender waist and her hands came up to my shoulders. Her lips were soft and warm, and it was pleasant to kiss her. But there was neither passion nor promise there, only pleasant affection kindled to the contact-stage only because of a desire for physical experiment. I let her go after a very brief kiss; just long enough to assure myself that having a rock-hard body had not eliminated the pleasure of physical contact.

FARROW stepped back without a fluster. "One thing you'll have to remember," she said cheerfully, "is only to mix with your own kind from now on. Now go get that shower and shave. I'll be getting breakfast."

Showering was not hard and I remembered not to twist off the water tap handles. Shaving was easy although I had to change razor blades three times in the process. I broke all the teeth out of the comb because it was never in-

tended to be pulled through a thicket of piano wire.

Getting dressed was something else. I caught my heel in one trouser leg and shredded the cloth. I broke the buckle on my belt. My shoelaces went without a twitch, sort of like parting a length of wet spaghetti. The button on the top of my shirt pinched off and when I gave that final jerk to my necktie it pulled the knot down into something about the size of a pea. Breakfast was very pleasant although I bent the fork tines spearing a rasher of bacon and removed the handle of my coffee cup without half trying. After breakfast I discovered that I could not remove a cigarette from the package without pinching the end down flat, and after I succeeded in getting one into my mouth, I broke four matches one after the other. When I finally managed, by treating both smoke and match as if they were made of tissue paper, my first drag on the smoke lit a howling furnace-fire on the end that consumed half of the cigarette in the first puff.

"You're going to take some schooling before you are fit to walk among normal people, Steve," said Farrow with amused interest.

"You're informing me?" I asked with some dismay, eyeing the wreckage left in my wake. Compared to the New Steve Cornell,

the famous bull in the china shop was a gentle Ferdinand. I picked up the cigarette package again; it squeeze down even though I tried to treat it gentle; I felt like Lenny, pinching the head off of a mouse in Steinbeck's *Of Mice And Men*. I also felt about as much of a bumbling idiot as Lenny, too.

My re-education went on before, through, and after breakfast. I handled—manhandled, that is—old books from the attic. I shredded newspapers. I ruined some more lead pencils and finally broke the pencil sharpener to boot. I put an elbow through the middle panel of the kitchen door without even feeling it and then managed to twist off the door-knob. Generally operating like a one-man army of vandals, I laid waste to the Farrow home.

Having thus ruined a nice house, Gloria decided to try my strength on her car. I was much too fast and too hard on the brakes, which of course was not too bad because my lead foot was a bit too insensitive on the go-pedal. We took off like a rocket being launched and then I tromped on the brakes (Bending the pedal slightly) which brought us down sharp like hitting a haystack. This allowed our heads to catch up with the rest of us; I'm sure that if we'd been normal bodied human beings we'd have

had our spines snapped. Eventually I learned that everything had to be handled as if it were tissue paper, and gradually re-adjusted my reflexes to take proper cognizance of the feed-back data according to my new body.

We returned home after a hectic twenty miles of roadwork and I broke the glass as I slammed the car door.

"It's going to take time," I admitted with some reluctance.

"It always does," smiled Farrow as cheerfully as if I hadn't ruined their possessions.

"I don't know how I'm going to face your folks."

Farrow's smile became cryptic. "Maybe they won't notice."

"Now look, Farrow—"

"Steve, don't forget for the moment that you're the only known Mekstrom Carrier."

"In other words your parents are due for the treatment next?"

"Oh, I was most thorough. Both of them are in the final stages right now. I'm sure that anything you did to the joint will only be added to by the time they get to the walking stage. And also anything you did they'll feel well repaid."

"I didn't do anything for them."

"You provided them with Mekstrom bodies," she said simply.

"They took to it willingly?"

"Yes. As soon as they were

convinced by watching me and my strength. They knew what it would be like, but they were all for it."

"You've been a very busy girl," I told her.

SHE just nodded. Then she looked up at me with troubled eyes and asked, "What are you going to do now, Steve?"

"I'm going to haul the whole damned shebang down like Samson in the Temple."

"A lot of innocent people are going to get hurt if you do that."

"I can't very well find a cave in Antarctica and hide," I replied glumly.

"Think a bit, Steve. Could either side afford to let you walk into New Washington as you are right now? With the living proof of your Mekstrom Body?"

Didn't stop 'em before, I thought angrily. And it seems to me that both sides were sort of urging me to go and do something that would uncover the other side.

"Not deep enough," said Farrow. "That was only during the early phases. Go back to the day when you didn't know what the hell was going on."

I grunted sourly, "Look, Farrow, why not tell me? Why must I fumble my way through this as I've fumbled through everything else?"

"Because only by coming to the

conclusion in your own way will you be convinced that someone isn't lying to you. Now, think it over, Steve."

It made sense. Hell, even if I came to the wrong conclusion, I'd believe in more than if someone had told me. Farrow nodded, following my thoughts. Then I plunged in:

First we have a man who is found to be a carrier of Mekstrom's Disease, so far as is known the only carrier. He doesn't know; in fact he is only slightly familiar with the disease, let alone knowing anything about its workings. Right? (Farrow nodded slowly) So now The Medical Center puts an anchor onto their carrier by sicking an attractive dame on his trail Um— At this point I went into a bit of a mental whirly-around trying to find an answer to one of the puzzlers. Farrow just looked at me with a non-leading expression, waiting. I came out of the merry-go-round after about six times around the circuit and went on.

I don't know all the factors. Obviously, Catherine had to lead me fast because we had to marry before she contracted the disease from me. But there's a discrepancy, Farrow. The little blonde receptionist caught it in twenty-four hours, yet—?

"Steve," said Farrow, "this is

one that I'll have to explain, since you're not a medical person. The period of incubation seems to depend upon the type of contact. You actually bit the receptionist. That put blood contact into it. You didn't draw any blood from Catherine."

"We were pretty close," I said with a slight reddening of the ears.

"From a medical standpoint, you were not much closer to Catherine than you have been to me, or Dr. Thorndyke. You were closer to Thorndyke and me, say, than you've been to many of the incidental parties along the path of your travels."

"Well, let that angle go for the moment. Anyway, Catherine and I had to marry before the initial traces were evident. I suppose then that I'd be in the position of a man whose wife had contracted Mektstrom's Disease on our honeymoon, whereupon the Medical Center would step in and cure her, and I'd be in the position of being forever grateful and willing to do anything that The Medical Center wanted me to do. And as a poor non-telepath, I'd probably never learn the truth. Right?"

"So far," she said, still in a non-committal tone.

"SO now we crack up along the Highway near the Harrison

place. The Highways take her in because they take any victim in no matter what. I also presume from what's gone on that Catherine is a high enough telepath to conceal her thinking and so to become an undercover agent in the midst of the Highways organization. And at this point the long trail takes a fork, doesn't it? The Medical Center gang did not know about the Highways In Hiding until Catherine and I barrelled into it end over end."

Farrow's face softened and although she said nothing I knew I was on the right track.

So at this point, I went on silently, Medical Center found themselves in a mild quandary. They could hardly put another woman on my trail because I was already emotionally involved with the missing Catherine— missing to me, at least — and so they decided to use me in another way. I was shown enough to keep me busy; I was more or less urged to go track down the Highways In Hiding for The Medical Center, although for the life of me I don't know why. After all, as soon as I'd made the initial discovery, Phelps and his outfit shouldn't have needed any more help.

"A bit more thinking, Steve. You've come up with that answer before."

Sure. Phelps wanted me to take my tale to the Government. About this secret Highway outfit. But if neither side can afford to have the secret come out, how come—? I pondered this for a long time and admitted that it made no sense to me. Finally Farrow shook her head and said,

"Steve, I've got to prompt you now and then. But remember that I'm trying to make you think it out yourself. Now consider: You are running an organization that must be kept secret. Then someone learns the secret and starts heading for the Authorities. What is your next move?"

"Okay," I replied. "So I'm stupid. Naturally, I pull in my horns, hide my signs, and make like nothing was going on."

"So stopping the advance of your organization, which is all that Phelps really can expect."

I thought some more. *And the fact that I was carrying a story that would get me popped into the nearest hatch for the incipient paranoid made it all right?*

She nodded.

"And now?" she asked me.

"And now I'm living proof of my story. Is that right?"

"Right. And Steve, do not forget for one moment that the only reason that you're still alive is because you are valuable to both sides alive. Dead, you're only

good for a small quantity of Mekstrom Innoculation."

"Don't follow," I grunted. "As you say, I'm no medical person."

"Alive, your hair grows and must be cut. You shave and trim off your beard. Your fingernails are pared. Now and then you lose a small bit of hide or a few milliliters of blood. These are things that, when injected under the skin of a normal human, makes them Mekstrom's Disease victims. Dead, your ground up body would not provide much substance."

"Pleasant prospect," I growled. "So what do I do to avert this future?"

"Steve, I don't know. I've done what I can for you. I've effected the so-called cure and I've done it in safety; you're still an un-reoriented Steve Cornell, which wouldn't have been the case if you'd stayed at The Medical Center."

CHAPTER XXII

"LOOK," I blurted with a sudden rush of brains to the head, "if I'm so all-fired important to both sides, how come you managed to sequester me for four months?"

"We do have the Laws of Privacy," said Farrow simply. "Which neither side can afford to flout overtly. Furthermore, since neither side really knew where you were, they've been busily prowling one

another's camps and blocking the prowlers from one another's camps, and playing spy and counterspy, and generally piling it up pyramid-wise," she finished with a chuckle, "You got away with your following that letter to Catherine because uppermost in your mind was the brain of a lover hunting down his missing sweetheart. No one could go looking for Steve Cornell, Mekstrom Carrier for reasons not intrinsically private."

"For four months?" I asked, still incredulous.

"Well, one of the angles is that both sides knew you must be immobilized somewhere, going through this cure. Having you a full Mekstrom is something that both sides want. So they've been willing to have you cured."

"So long as someone does the work, huh?"

"Right," she said seriously.

"Well, then," I said with a grim smile, "The obvious thing for me to do is to slink quietly into New Washington and to seek out some high official in secrecy. I'll put my story and my facts into his hands, make him a Mekstrom, have him cured, and then we'll set up an agency to provide the general public with—"

"Steve, you're supposed to be an engineer. I presume you've studied mathematics. So let's as-

sume that you can— er— bite one person every ten seconds."

"That's six persons per minute; three-sixty per hour; and ah, eighty-six-forty per day. With one hundred and sixty million at the last census— um. Sixty years without sleep. I see what you mean."

"Not only that, Steve, but it would create a panic, if not a global war. Make an announcement like that, and certain of our not-too-friendly neighbors would demand their shares or else. So now add up your time to take care of about four billion human souls on this Earth, Steve."

"All right. So I'll forget that cockeyed notion. But still, the Government should know—"

"If we could be absolutely certain that every elected official is a sensible, honest man, we could," said Farrow. "The trouble is that we've got enough demagogues, publicity hounds, and rabble-rousers to make the secret impossible to keep."

I couldn't argue against that. Farrow was right. Not only that, but Government found it hard enough to function in this world of Rhine Institute with honest secrets. Anybody hoping to get elected while carrying secrets of public importance would not get far; and he would be forced to admit the secret.

"Okay, then," I said. "The only thing to do is to go back to Homestead, Texas, throw my aid to the Highways In Hiding, and see what we can do to provide the Earth with some more sensible method of inoculation. I obviously cannot go around biting people for the rest of my life."

"I guess that's it, Steve."

I looked at her. "I'll have to borrow your car."

"It's yours."

"You'll be all right?"

She nodded. "Eventually I'll be a way station on the Highways, I suppose. Can you make it alone, Steve? Or would you rather wait until my parents are cured? You could still use a telepath, you know."

"Think it's safe for me to wait?"

"It's been four months. Another week — ?"

"All right. And in the meantime I'll practice getting along with this new body of mine."

We left it there. I roamed the house with Farrow, helping her with her parents. We discussed this and that, and although I was in no position to really understand what and how and why the two factions had acted as they had, the fact was solid. They had, and what their angle was seemed of less importance than the fact. I gradually learned not to overreach myself; learned how to con-

trol the power of my new muscles; learned how to walk among normal people without attracting their attention; and one day succeeded in shaking hands with a storekeeper without giving away my secret.

Eventually Nurse Farrow's parents came out of their treatment and we spent another couple of days with them.

WE left them too soon, I'm sure but they seemed willing that we take off. They'd set up a telephone system for getting supplies so that they'd not have to go into town until they learned how to handle their bodies properly, and Farrow admitted that there was little more that we could do.

So we took off because we all knew that time was running out. Even though both sides had left us alone while I was immobilized, both sides must have a timetable good enough to predict my eventual cure. In fact, as I think about it now, both sides must have been waiting along the outer edges of some theoretical area waiting for me to emerge, since they couldn't come plowing in without giving away their purpose.

So we left in Farrow's car and once more hit the broad road.

We drove towards Texas until we came upon a Highway and then turned along it looking for a way station. I wanted to get in

touch with the Highways again as soon as I could. I wanted close communication with the Harrisons and the rest of them, no matter what.

Eventually we came upon a Sign with a missing spoke and turned in.

The side road wound in and out, leading us back from the Highway towards the conventional dead area. The house was a white structure among a light thicket of trees, and as we came close to it we met a man busily tilling the soil with a tractor plough.

Farrow stopped her car. I leaned out and started to call, but something stopped me. He was no Mekstrom.

"He isn't, Steve," said Farrow in a whisper.

"But this is a way station, according to the road sign."

"I know. But it isn't according to him. He doesn't know any more about Mekstrom's Disease than you did before you met Catherine."

"Then what the hell's wrong?"

"I don't know. He's perceptive, but not too well trained. Name's William Carroll. Let me do the talking. I'll drop leading remarks for you to pick up."

The man came over amiably. "Looking for someone?" he asked cheerfully.

"Why, yes," said Farrow. "We're

sort of mildly acquainted with the—Mannheims who used to live here. Sort of friends of friends of theirs, just dropped by to say hello, sort of," she went on, covering up the fact that she'd picked the name of the former occupant out of his mind.

"The Mannheims moved about two months ago," he said. "Sold the place to us—we got a bargain. Don't really know, of course, but the story is that one of them had to move for his health."

"Too bad. Know where they went?"

"No," said Carroll regretfully. "Too bad, too. They seem to have a lot of friends. Always stopping by, but I can't help 'em any."

So they moved so fast that they couldn't even change their Highway Sign? I thought worriedly.

Farrow nodded at me almost imperceptibly. Then she said to Carroll, "Well, we won't keep you. Too bad the Mannheims moved, without leaving an address."

"Yeah," he said with obvious semi-interest. He eyed his half-ploughed field and Farrow started her car.

We started off and he turned to go back to his work. "Anything?" I asked.

"No," she said, but it was a very puzzled voice. "Nothing that I can put a finger on."

"But what?"

"I don't know much about real estate deals," she said. "I suppose that one family could move out and another family move in just in this short a time."

"Usually they don't let farmlands lie fallow," I pointed out. "If there's anything off color here, it's the fact that they changed their residence without changing the Highway Sign."

"Unless," I suggested brightly, "this is the coincidence. Maybe this sign is really one that got busted."

Farrow turned her car into the main highway and we went along it. I could have been right about the spoke actually being broken instead of removed for its directing purpose. I hoped so. In fact I hoped so so hard that I was almost willing to forget the other bits of evidence. But then I had to face the truth because we passed another Highway Sign and, of course, its directional information pointed to that farm. The signs on our side of the highway were upside down; indicating that we were leaving the way station. The ones that were posted on the left hand side were rightside up, indicating that the driver was approaching a way station. That cinched it.

Well, as I told both me and Farrow, *one error doesn't create a trend. Let's take another look!*

ONE thing and another, we would either hit another way station before we got to Homestead, or we wouldn't. Either one could put us wise. So we took off again with determination and finally left that set of erroneous Highway Signs when we turned onto Route 66. We weren't on Route 66 very long because the famous U. S. Highway sort of trends to the Northeast and Homestead was in a Southern portion of Texas. We left Route 66 at Amarillo and picked up U. S. 87, which lead due South.

Not many miles out of Amarillo we came upon another set of Highway Signs that pointed us on to the South. I tried to remember whether this section led to Homestead by a long route, but I hadn't paid too much attention to the maps when I'd had the chance and therefore the facts eluded me.

We'd find out, Farrow and I agreed, and then before we could think much more about it, we came upon a way station sign that pointed into another farmhouse.

"Easy," I said.

"You bet," she replied, pointing to the rural-type mailbox alongside the road.

I nodded. The box was not new but the lettering on the side was. "Still wet," I said with a grunt. This was not true, of course, but

it indicates the way I felt.

Farrow slowed her car as we approached the house and I leaned out and gave a cheerful hail. A woman came out of the front door and waved at us.

"I'm trying to locate a family named Harrison," I called. "Lived around here somewhere."

The woman looked thoughtful. She was maybe thirty-five or so, clean but not company-dressed. There was a smudge of flour on her cheek and a smile on her face and she looked wholesome and honest.

"Why, I don't really know," she said. "That name sounds familiar, but then it is not an uncommon name."

"I know," I said uselessly. Farrow nudged me on the ankle with her toe and then made a swift sign for "P" in the hand-sign code.

"Why don't you come on in?" invited the woman. "We've got an area telephone directory here. Maybe—?"

Farrow nudged me once more and made the sign of the "M" with her swift fingers. We had hit it this time; here was a woman perceptive and a Mekstrom residing in a way station. I took a mild dig at her hands and there was no doubt of her.

A man's head appeared in the doorway above the woman; he had a hard face and he was tall and

broad shouldered but there was a smile on his face that spread around the pipe he was biting on. He called, "Come on in and take a look."

Farrow made the sign of a "T" and then the "M" and that told me that he was a telepath. She hadn't needed the "M" sign because I'd taken a fast glimpse of his hide as soon as he appeared. Parrying for time and something evidential, I merely said, "No, we'd hate to intrude. We were just asking."

The man said, "Oh, shucks, Mister. Come on in and have a cup of coffee, anyway." His invitation was swift, just barely swift enough to set me on edge. Even in the open country people do not invite absolute strangers in for coffee without some reason.

So I turned my perception away from him and took a fast cast at the surrounding territory. There was a mildly dead area along the lead-in road to the left: it curved around in a large arc and the other horn of this sort-of horse-shoe shape came up behind the house and stopped abruptly just inside of their front door. The density of this dead area varied, the end in which the house was built was a total blank that I couldn't penetrate for more than an inch, while the other end that curved around to end by the road

was tapering off in deadness so thin that it was hard to define the boundary.

If someone were pulling a flanking movement around through that horseshoe to cut off our retreat, it would become evident very soon.

A swift thought went through my mind: *Farrow, if they're Mekstroms and he's a telepath and she's a perceptive, they know we're friendly — if they're Highways. And not-friendly if they're connected with Scholar Phelps and his—*

The man repeated, "Come on in. We've some mail to go to Homestead that you can take if you will."

Farrow made no sound. She just seesawed her car with three rapid back-and-forth jerks that sent showers of stones from her spinning wheels. We whined around from the last jockey in a curve that careened the car up on its outside wheels. Then we ironed out and we showered the fact of the man with stones and dust from the wheels as we took off. It was that last that kept him from latching onto the tail of the car and climbing in, I think. The shower of dust and stone blinded him, and being telepath he could not judge distances unless someone were actually thinking of him and his attack in term of distance. At any rate

we left him behind, swearing and rubbing dirt from his eyes.

WE whipped past the other end of the horseshoe area just as a jeepster came roaring down out of the thickened part into the region where my perception could make out the larger masses of important things, (Like a jeepster containing three burly gents wearing hunting rifles, for instance.) They jounced over the rough ground and onto the lead-in road just behind us; another few seconds of gab with our friends and they'd have been able to cut us off.

"Pour it on, Farrow!"

I had to tell her, of course. Yeah man. I thought I was a bit of a cowboy, but Farrow made me look like a tenderfoot. We rocketed down the winding road with our wheels riding up on either side like the course in a toboggan run and Farrow rode that car like a test pilot in a sudden thunderstorm.

I was worried about the hunting rifles, but I need not have been concerned. We were going too fast to make good aim, and their jeepster was not a vehicle known for its smooth riding qualities. In fact, they lost one character over a rough bounce and he went tail over scalp into the grass along the way.

It was this guy that gave us the

only bit of trouble; he scared me by leaping to his feet, grabbing the rifle and throwing it up to aim. But before he could squeeze off a round we were out of the lead-in road and on the broad highway.

Once on the main road again, Farrow put the car hard down by the nose and we outran their jeepster, which was not a vehicle noted either for its smooth riding features, nor its speed. The jeepster was a workhorse and could have either pulled over the house or maybe have climbed the wall and run along the roof. But it was not made for chase.

"That," I said, "seems to be that."

"Something is bad," agreed Farrow.

"Well, I doubt that they'll be able to clean out a place as big as Homestead. So let's take our careful route to Homestead and find out precisely what the devil is cooking."

"Know the route?"

"No, but I know where it is on the map and we can figure it out from—"

"Steve, stop. Take a very careful dig over to the right."

"Digging for what?"

"Another car pacing us along a road on the other side of that field."

I tried and failed. Then I leaned back in the seat and closed

my eyes and tried again. On this second try I got a very hazy perception of a large moving mass that could only have been a car. In the car I received a stronger impression of weapons. It was the latter that cinched it. While I'm not at all telepathic, it is still true that I have been able to catch the perception of danger from a longer distance than I dig other things, and I've also noted that a weapon comes through as an impression of danger only providing the weapon-carrier has me and my undoing in his mind. I've been told by detectives and policemen that this is a normal thing although I've never heard it explained; why a weapon in possession of mine enemy comes through from a greater distance than a gun hanging on someone's living room wall smacks of telepathy, but I'm no telepath and — well that's not important here.

I hauled out my roadmap and turned it to Texas. I thumbed the sectional maps of Texas until I located the sub-district through which we were passing and then I identified this section of U. S. 87 precisely. There was another road parallel and a half mile to the right, a dirt road according to the map-legend. It intersected our road a few miles ahead.

My next was a thorough covering of the road behind; and as I

expected, just beyond the range of my perception for anything but a rifle aimed at my hide, was another car pacing us.

Pacing isn't quite the word, although I use it in the sense of their keeping up with us. Fact is that all of us were going about as fast as we could go, with safety something of secondary or tertiary importance. Anyway, they were pacing us and closing down from that parallel road on the right.

I took a fast and very careful scanning of the landscape to our left but couldn't find anything. I spent some time at it then, but still came up with a blank.

Turn left at that feeder road a mile ahead, I thought at Farrow and she nodded.

THERE was one possibility that I did not like to face. We had definitely detected pursuit to our right and behind, but not to our left. This did not mean that the left-side was not covered. It was quite likely that the gang to the rear were in telepathic touch with a network of other telepaths the end of which mental link was far beyond our range, but as close in touch with our position and actions as if they'd been in eyesight range. The police make stakeout nets that way, but the idea was not patentable nor exclusive. It isn't even illegal; I recall hazing an eloping

couple that way once.

But there was nothing to do but to take the feeder road to the left, because the devil we could see was more dangerous than the devil we couldn't.

Farrow whipped into the side road and we tore along with only a slight slowing of our headlong speed. I ranged ahead, worried, suspicious of everything, scanning very carefully and strictly on the watch for any evidence of attempted interception.

I caught a touch of danger converging up from the South on a series of small roads. This I did not consider dangerous after a fast look at my roadmap because this series of roads did not meet our side road for a long time and only after a lot of turning and twisting. So long as we went Easterly, we were okay from that angle.

The gang behind, of course, followed us, staying at the very edge of my range.

"You'll have to fly, Farrow," I told her. "If that gang to our South stays there, we'll not be able to turn down Homestead way."

"Steve, I'm holding this crate on the road by main force and awkwardness as it is."

But she did step it up a bit, at that. I kept a cautious and suspicious watchout, worrying in the

back of my mind that someone among them might turn up with a jetcopter. So long as the sky remained clear—

As time went on, I perceived that the converging car to the South was losing ground because of the convolutions of their road. Accordingly we turned to the South, making our way around their nose, sort of, and crossing their anticipated course to lead to the South. We hit U. S. 180 to the West of Breckenridge Texas and then Farrow really poured on the coal. The idea was to hit Forth Worth and lose them in the city where fun, games, and telepath-perceptive hare - and - hounds would be viewed dimly by the peace-loving citizens. Then we'd slope to the South on U. S. 81, cut over to U. S. 75 somewhere to the South of Dallas and take 75 like a cannonball until we turned off on the familiar road to Homestead.

Fort Worth was a haven and a detriment to both sides. Neither of us could afford to run afoul of the law. So we both cut down to sensible speeds and snaked our way through the town, with Farrow and me probing the roads to the South in hope of finding a clear lane.

There were three cars pacing us, cutting off our retreat Southward. They hazed us forward to the East

like a dog nosing a bunch of sheep towards pappy's barn.

Then we were out of Forth Worth and still on U. S. 180. We whipped into Dallas and tried the same circumfusion as before and we were as neatly barred as before. So we went out of Dallas on U. S. 67 and as we left the city limits, we poured on the oil again, hoping to get around them so that we could turn back South towards Homestead.

"Boxed," I said.

"Looks like it," said Farrow unhappily.

I looked at her. She was showing signs of weariness and I realized that she'd been riding this road for hours. "Let me take it," I said.

"We need your perception," she objected. "You can't drive and keep a ranging perception, Steve."

"A lot of good a ranging perception will do once you drop dead for lack of sleep and we tie us up in a ditch."

"But—"

"We're boxed," I told her. "We're being hazed. Let's face it, Farrow. They could have surrounded us and glommed us any time in the past six hours."

"Why didn't they?" she asked.

"You ask that because you're tired," I said with a grim smile. "Any bunch that has enough cars to throw a barrier along the

street of cities like Fort Worth and Dallas have enough manpower to catch us if they want to. So long as we drive where they want us to go, they won't cramp us down."

"I hate to admit it."

"So do I. But let's swap, Farrow. Then you can use your telepathy on them maybe and find out what their game is."

SHE nodded, pulled the car down to a mere ramble and we swapped seats quickly. As I let the crate out again, I took one last, fast dig of the landscape and located the four cars that were blocking out the passageways to the South, West, and North, leaving a nice inviting hole to the Easterly-North way. Then I had to haul in my perception and slap it along the road ahead, because I was going to ramble far and fast and see if I could speed out of the trailing horseshoe and cut out around the South horn with enough leeway to double towards Homestead.

"Catch any plans from them?" I asked Farrow.

There was no answer. I looked at her. Gloria Farrow was semi-collapsed in her seat, her eyes closed gently and her breath coming in long, pleasant swells. I'd known she was tired, but I hadn't expected this absolute ungluing.

A damned good kid, Farrow.

At that last thought, Farrow moved slightly in her sleep and a wisp of a smile crossed her lips briefly. Then she turned a bit and snuggled down in the seat and really hit the slumber-path.

A car came roaring at me with flashing headlamps and I realized that dusk was coming. I didn't need the lights, but oncoming drivers did, so I snapped them on. The beams made bright tunnels in the night and we went along and on and on and on, hour after hour. Now and then I caught a perceptive impression of the crescent of cars that were coralling us along U. S. 67 and not letting us off the route.

I hauled out my roadmap and flipped the pages as I drove by perception. U. S. 67 led to St. Louis and from there due North. I had a hunch that by the time we played hide and seek through St. Louis and got ourselves hazed out to their satisfaction, I'd be able to give a strong guess as to our ultimate destination.

I settled down in my seat and just drove, still hoping to cut fast and far around them on my way to Homestead.

CHAPTER XXIII

THREE times during the night I tried to flip around and

cut my way through their cordon, and each time I faced interception. It was evident that we were being driven and so long as we went to their satisfaction they weren't going to clobber us.

Nurse Farrow woke up along about dawn, stretched, and remarked that she could use a toothbrush and a tub of hot water and amusedly berated herself for not filling the back seat before we took off. Then she became serious again and asked for the details of the night, which I slipped her as fast as I could.

We stopped long enough to swap seats, and I stretched out but I couldn't sleep.

Finally I said, "Stop at the next dog wagon, Farrow. We're going to eat, comes anything."

"Won't that be dangerous?"

"Shucks," I grunted angrily. "They'll probably thank us. They're probably hungry, too."

"We'll find out."

The smell of a roadside diner is usually a bit on the thick and greasy side, but I was so hungry that morning that it smelled like Mother's Kitchen. We went in, ordered coffee and orange juice, and then disappeared into the rest rooms long enough to clean up. That felt good, and so when we got back we ordered the works and watched the guy behind the fryplate handle the bacon, eggs,

and home fries with a deft efficient manner.

We pitched in fast, hoping to beat the flies to our breakfast. We were so intent that we paid no attention to the car that came into the lot until a man came in, ordered coffee and a roll, and then carried it over to our table.

"Fine day for a ride, isn't it?"

I eyed him; Farrow bristled and got very tense. I said, "I doubt that I know you, friend."

"Quite likely. But I know you, Cornell."

I took a fast dig; there was no sign of anything lethal except the usual collection of tire irons, screwdrivers, and other tools which, oddly enough, seldom come through as being dangerous because they're not weapons-by-design.

"I'm not heeled, Cornell. I'm just here to save us all some trouble."

Telepath?

He nodded imperceptibly. Then he said, "We'll all save time, gasoline, and maybe getting into grief with the cops if you take Route 40 out of St. Louis."

"Suppose I don't like U. S. 40?"

"Get used to it," he said with a crooked smile. "Because you'll take U. S. 40 out of St. Louis whether you like it or not."

I returned his crooked smile. I

also dug his hide and he was a Mekstrom, of course. "Friend," I replied, "Nothing would convince me, after what you've said, that U. S. 40 is anything but a cow-path, slippery when wet, and impassable in the Early Spring, Late Summer, and the third Thursday after Michelmas."

He stood up. "Cornell, I can see your point. You don't like U. S. 40. So I'll help you good people. If you don't want to drive along such a lousy slab of concrete, just say the word and we'll arrange for you to take it in style, luxury, and without a trace of pain or strain. Anyway, I'll be seein' you. And a very pleasant trip to you, Miss Farrow."

Then the bastard got up, went to the cashier and paid for our breakfast as well as his own. He took off in his car and I have never seen him since.

Farrow looked at me, her face white and her whole attitude one of fright. "U. S. 40," she said in a shaky voice, "runs like a stretched string from St. Louis to Indianapolis."

She didn't have to tell me any more. About sixty miles North of Indianapolis on Indiana State Highway 37 lies the thriving metropolis of Marion, Indiana, the most important facet of which (to Farrow and me) is an establishment called The Medical Re-

search Center.

Nothing was going to make me drive out of St. Louis along U. S. 40. Period; End of message; No answer required.

Nothing, because I was very well aware of their need to collect me alive and kicking. If I could not roar out of St. Louis in the direction I selected, I was going to turn my car end for end and have at them. Not in any mild manner, but with deadly intent to do deadly damage. If I'd make a mild pass, they'd undoubtedly corral me by main force and carry me off kicking and screaming. But if I went at them to kill or get killed, they'd have to move aside just to prevent me from killing myself. I didn't think I'd get to the last final blow of that self-destruction. I'd win through.

So we left the diner after a breakfast on our enemy's expense account and took off again.

I was counting on St. Louis. The center of the old city is one big shapeless blob of a dead area; so nice and cold that St. Louis has reversed the usual city-type blight area growth. Ever since Rhine, the slum sections have been moving out and the new buildings have been moving in. So with the dead area and the brand-new, wide streets and fancy traffic control, St. Louis was the place

to go roaring in along one road, get lost in traffic, and come roaring out along any road desirable. I could not believe that any outfit, hoping to work under cover, could collect enough manpower and cars to block every road, lane, highway, and duck-runway that led out of a city as big as St. Louis.

Again they hazed us by pacing along parallel roads and behind us with the open end of their crescent aimed along U. S. 67. We went like hell, without slowing a bit we sort of swooped up to St. Louis and took a fast dive into that big blob-shaped dead area. We wound us up in traffic and tied Boy Scout knots in our course. I was concerned about overhead coverage from a 'copter even though I've been told that the St. Louis dead area extends upward, in some places, as high as thirteen thousand feet.

The only thing missing was some device or doodad that would let us use our perception or telepathy in this deadness while they couldn't. As it was, we were as psi-blind as they were, so we had to go along the streets with our eyes carefully peeled for cars of questionable ownership. We saw some passenger cars with out of state licenses and gave them wide clearances. One of them hung on our tail until I committed a very neat coup by running through a

stoplight and sandwiching my car between two whopping big fourteen-wheel moving vans. I'd have enjoyed the expression on the driver's face if I could have seen it. But then we were gone and he was probably cussing.

I stayed between the vans as we wound ourselves along the road and turned into a side street.

I stayed between them too long.

Because the guy in front slammed on his air-brakes and the big van came to a stop with a howl of tires on concrete. The guy behind did not even slow down. He closed in on us like an avalanche. I took a fast look around and fought the wheel of my car to turn aside, but he whaled into my tail and we went sliding forward. I was riding my brakes but the mass of that moving van was so great that my tires just wore flats on the pavement-side of the wheels.

In front, we were bearing down on that stopped van and it looked as though we were going to be driving a very tall car with a very short wheelbase in a very short time.

Then the whole back panel of the front van came tumbling towards me from the top, pivoting on a hinge at the bottom. The top edge hit the road, making a fine ramp. The van behind me nudged us up the ramp and we hurtled forward against a thick, resilient pad

that stopped my car without any damage either to the nose end or to the inhabitants.

Then the back panel closed up and the van took off.

Two big birds on each side opened the doors of our car simultaneously and said "Out!"

The tall guy on my side gave me a cocksure smile and the short guy (Short? I mean shorter. The tall bird was about six-four and the short one was only about six-one.) said, "We're about to leave St. Louis on U. S. 40, Cornell. I hope you won't find this journey too rough."

I started to take a swing, but the tall one caught my elbow and threw me off balance. The short one reached down and picked up a baseball bat. "Use this, Cornell," he told me. "Then no one will get hurt."

I looked at the pair of them, and then gave up. There are odd characters in this world who actually enjoy physical combat and don't mind getting hurt if they can hurt the other guy more. These were the type. Taking that baseball bat and busting it over the head of either one would be the same sort of act as kids use when they square off in an alley and exchange light blows which they call a "cardy" just to make the fight legal. All it would get me was a sore jaw and a few cracked

ribs.

So after my determination to take after them with murderous intent, they'd pulled my teeth by scooping me up in this van and practically disarming me.

I relaxed.

The short one nodded, although he looked disappointed that I hadn't allowed him the fun of a shindy. "You'll find U. S. 40 less rough than you expected," he said. "After all, it's like life; only rough if you make it rough."

"Go to hell and stay there," I snapped. That was about as weak a rejoinder as I've ever emitted, but it was all I could get out.

The tall one said, "Take it easy, Cornell. Hell you can't win 'em all."

I looked across the nose of our trapped car to Farrow. She was leaning against the hood, facing her pair. They were just standing there at ease. One of them was offering her a cigarette and the other held a lighter ready. "Relax," said the one with the smokes. The other one said, "Might as well, Miss Farrow. Fighting won't get nobody nowhere but where you're going anyway. Might as well go on your own feet."

Scornfully, Farrow shrugged. "Why should I smoke my own?" she asked nobody in particular.

Mentally I agreed: *Take 'em for all they're worth, Farrow!* And

then I reached for one, too. Along the side of the van were benches. I sat down, stretched out on my back and let the smoke trickle up. I finished my cigarette and then found that the excitement of this chase, having died so abruptly, left me with only a desire to catch up on sleep.

I dozed off thinking that it wasn't everybody who started off to go to Homestead, Texas, and ended up in Marion, Indiana.

SCHOLAR Phelps did not have the green carpet out for our arrival, but he was present when our mobile prison cell opened deep inside of The Medical Center grounds. So was Thorndyke. Thorndyke and three nurses of the Amazon build escorted Farrow off with the air of captors collecting a traitor.

Phelps smiled superciliously at me and said, "Well, young sir, you've given us quite a chase."

"Give me another chance and we'll have another chase," I told him grumpily.

"Not if we can help it," he boomed cheerfully. "We've big plans for you."

"Have I got a vote? It's 'Nay!' if I do."

"You're too precipitous," he told me. "It is always an error, Mr. Cornell, to be opinionated. Have an open mind."

"To what?"

"To everything," he said with an expansive gesture. "The error of all thinking, these days, is that people do not think. They merely follow someone else's thinking."

"And I'm to follow yours?"

"I'd prefer that, of course. It would indicate that you were possessed of a mind of your own; that you weren't merely taking the lazy man's attitude and following in the footsteps of your father."

"Skip it," I snapped. "Your way isn't—"

"Now," he warned with a wave of a forefinger like a prohibitionist warning someone not to touch that quart, "One must never form an opinion on such short notice. Remember, all ideas are not to be rejected just because they do not happen to agree with your own preconceived notions."

"Look, Phelps," I snapped, deliberately omitting his title which I knew would bite a little, "I don't like your personal politics and I deplore your methods. You damned well can't go on playing this way—"

"Young man, you err," he said quietly. He did not even look nettled that I'd addressed him in impolite (if not rough) terms. "May I point out that I am far ahead of your game? Thoroughly outnumbered, and I must admit to total ignorance of the counter-move-

ment against me until you so vigorously brought it to my attention, within a year I have fought the counter movement to a standstill, caused the dispersement of their main forces, ruined their far-flung lines of communication, and have so consolidated my position that I have now made open capture of the main roving factor. The latter is you, young man. A very disturbing influence and so very necessary to the conduct of this private war. You prate of my attitude, Mr. Cornell. You claim that such an attitude must be defeated. Yet as you stand there mouthing platitudes, we are preparing to make a frontal assault upon their main base at Homestead. We've waged our war of attrition; a mere spearhead will break them and scatter them to the far winds."

"Nice lecture," I grunted. "Who are your writers?"

"Let's not attempt sarcasm," he said crisply. "It sits ill upon you, Mr. Cornell."

"I'd like to sit on you," I snapped.

"Your humor is less tolerable than your sarcasm, and both are puny."

"Can it!" I snapped. "So you've collected me. I'll still—"

"You'll do very little, Mr. Cornell," he told me. "Your determination to attack us tooth and nail

was an excellent program, and with another type of person it might have worked. But I happen to know that your will to live is very great, young man, and that in the final blow, you'd not have the will to die great enough to carry your assault to its completion."

"Know a lot, don't you."

"Yes, indeed I do. So now if you're through trying to fence at words, we'll go to your quarters."

"Lead on," I said in a hollow voice.

With an air of stage-type politeness, he indicated a door. He showed me out and followed me. He steered me to a big limousine with a chauffeur and offered me cigarettes from a box on the arm rest as the driver started the turbine. The car purred with that muted sound of well-leashed power.

"You could be of inestimable value to us," he said in a conversational tone. "I am talking this way to you because you can be of much more value as a willing ally than you would be if unwilling."

"No doubt," I replied drily.

"I suggest that you set aside your preconceived notions and employ a modicum of practical logic," suggested Scholar Phelps. "Observe your position from a slightly different point of vantage. Be convinced that no matter what you do or say, we intend to

make use of you to the best of our ability. You are not entertaining any doubts of that fact, I'm sure."

I shrugged. Phelps was not asking me these things, the damned inquisitor was actually telling me. He went right on telling me:

"Since you will be used no matter what, you might consider the advisability of being sensible, Mr. Cornell. In blunt words, we are prepared to meet cooperation with certain benefits which will not be proffered otherwise."

"In blunter words you are offering to hire me."

Scholar Phelps smiled in a superior manner. "Not that blunt, Mr. Cornell, nor that crude. The term 'hire' implies the performance of certain tasks in return for stipulated remuneration. No, my intention is to give you a position in this organization the exact terms of which are not really definable. Look, young man, I've indicated that your willing cooperation is more valuable to us than otherwise. Join us and you will enjoy the freedom of our most valued and trusted members; you will take part in upper level planning; you will enjoy the income and advantages of top executive personnel." He stopped short and eyed me with a peculiar expression. "Mr. Cornell, you have the most disconcerting way. You've ac-

tually caused me to talk as if this organization were some sort of big business instead of a cultural unit."

I eyed him with the first bit of humor I'd found in many days. "You seem to talk just as though a cultural unit were set above, beyond, and spiritually divorced from anything so sordid as money, position, and the human equivalent of the barnyard pecking order," I told him. "So now let's stop goofing off, and put it into simple terms. You want me to join you willingly, to do your job for you, to advance your program. In return for which I shall be permitted to ride in the solid gold cadillac, quaff rare champagne, and select as bed partners such catalogued lovelies as fall within my level of the social order. Isn't that about it?"

"You put it rather sordidly," he objected with an obvious expression of regret.

"But if I refuse to join your gang, I'll be lucky if I am allowed to even look at anything above a personnel wagon; my diet will consist of table scraps; and my love life—" A sudden thought hit me and I turned and eyed him squarely. "— yes. My love life. On that I may have to amend my ideas of your willingness to provide. You seem to have quite a large hunk of interest in my love

life, don't you?"

Scholar Phelps found this was his turn to smile, and he looked like the wolf licking his chops over the Three Little Pigs. Very pointedly he said, "Mr. Cornell, it is said that every man creates his own personal torture on Earth. It might be a very enlightening study in human behaviour, Mr. Cornell."

He did not have to define it. He'd see to it that I was provided by the most appetizing of temp-resses; that I was housed in the most intimate of surroundings; and probably that I would be lambasted sight and sound and smell and taste and touch and maybe perception if he could arrange it. Then to crown the act, all he had to do was to offer a prize to the dame that made the grade. All I had to do was to say 'To hell with it' just once and the value of my uniform position as the only known Mekstrom Carrier would be ended.

And with it, me.

Fine picture.

Scholar Phelps smiled on, using a benign expression indicating he was pleased with himself, but which had absolutely nothing to do with his attitude towards me or any of the rest of the human race.

"And so, Mr. Cornell, we'll say no more at present. I am well aware of the time it may take for a

man to effect a change in his attitude. In fact, I would be very suspicious if you were to make an abrupt reversal. However, I have outlined my position and you may have time to think it over. Consider, at the very least, the fact that while cooperation will bring you pleasure and non-cooperation will bring you pain, the ultimate result will be that we will make use of your ability in either case. Now—I will say no more for the present."

The limousine had stopped in front of a four story brick building that was only slightly different in general architecture from others in The Medical Center. I could sense some slight difference, but when I took a dig at the interior I found to my amazement that this was one building in the entire area that had been built deliberately in a dead zone. This dead area stood up in the clarity like a little blob of black ink at the bottom of a crystal clear swimming pool, seen just before the ink began to diffuse.

Scholar Phelps saw my look of puzzlement and said, suavely, "We've reversed the usual method of keeping unwilling guests. Here we know their frame of mind and attitude; therefore to build the place in a dead area keeps them from plotting among themselves. I trust that your residence herein

will be only temporary, Mr. Cornell."

I nodded glumly. I was facing those last and final words: *Or Else!*

Phelps signed a register at a guard's station in the lobby. We took a very fast and efficient elevator to the third floor and Phelps escorted me along a hallway that was lined with doors, dormitory style. In the eye-level center of each door was a bull's eye that looked like one-way glass and undoubtedly was. I itched to take a look, but Phelps was not having any; he stopped my single step that way with a hand on my arm.

"This way," he said smoothly.

I went this way and was finally shown into one of the rooms. My nice clean cell away from home.

CHAPTER XXIV

AS soon as Phelps was gone, I took a careful look at my new living quarters. The room itself was about fourteen by eighteen, but the end in which I was confined was only fourteen by ten, the other eight feet of end being barred off by a very efficient-looking set of heavy metal rods and equally strong cross-girdering. There was a sliding door that fit in place as nicely as the door to a bank vault; it was locked by heavy

keeper-bars that slide up from the floor and down from the ceiling and they were actuated by motors hidden far out of my physical efforts. In the barrier was a flat horizontal slot wide enough to take a tray and high enough to pass a teacup. The bottom of this slot was flush with a small table that extended through the barrier by a couple of feet on both sides so that a tray could be set down on the outside and slipped in.

I tested the bars with my hands, but even my new set of muscles wouldn't flex them more than a few thousandths of an inch.

The walls were steel, I discovered as I tried them. All I got was a set of paint-clogged fingernails. The floor was also steel. The ceiling was a bit too high for me to tackle, but I assumed that it, too, was steel. The window was barred from the inside, undoubtedly so that any visitor from the outside would not catch on to the fact that this building was a private calaboose.

The— er— furnishings of this cold storage bin were meager and of minimum requirements. A washstand and toilet. A bunk made of metal girders welded to the floor. The bedding rested on wide resilient straps fixed to the cross-bars at top and bottom of the bed. A foam-rubber mattress, sheets, and one blanket finished

off the bed.

It was a cell designed by Mekstroms to contain Mekstroms and also designed by wiseacres to contain other wiseacres. The non-metallic parts of the room were, of course, fireproof. Anything I could get hold of was totally useless as a weapon or lever or tool; anything that might have been useful to a prisoner was welded down.

Having given up in the escape department, I sat on my bunk and lit a cigarette. I looked for tell-tales, and found a television lens set above the door of the room eight feet outside of my steel barrier. Beside the lens was a speaker grille and a smaller opening that looked like a microphone dust cover.

With a grunt, I flipped my cigarette at the television lens. I hit just above the hole, missing it by about an inch. Immediately a tinny-sounding voice said.

"That is not permitted, Mr. Cornell. You are expected to maintain some degree of personal cleanliness. Since you cannot pick up that cigarette butt, you have placed an unwelcome task upon our personnel. One more infraction of this nature and you will not be permitted the luxury of smoking."

"Go to hell!" I snapped.

There was no reply. Not even a haughty chuckle. The silence was

worse than any reply because it pointed out the absolute superiority of their position.

Eventually I dozed off, there being nothing else to do. When I awake they'd shoved a tray of food in on my table. I ate unenthusiastically. I dozed again, during which time someone removed the tray. When I woke up the second time it was night and time to go to bed, so I went. I woke up in the morning to see a burly guy enter with a tray of breakfast. I attempted to engage him in light conversation but he did not even let on that I was in the cell, let alone make any reply. Later he removed the tray as silently as he'd brought it, and I was left with another four hours of utter boredom until the same bird returned with a light lunch. Six hours after lunch came a slightly more substantial dinner, but no talk.

By bedtime the second night I was already getting a bit stir-crazy.

I hit the sack at about nine thirty, and tossed and turned, unable to drop off because I was not actually tired. I was also wondering when they'd come around with their brain-washing crew, or maybe someone who'd enter with an ultimatum.

On the following morning, the

tray-bearer was Dr. Thorndyke, who sat on the chair on the outside of my bars and looked at me silently. I tried giving him stare for stare, but eventually I gave up and said, "So, now where do we go?"

"Cornell, you're in a bad spot of your own making."

"Could be," I admitted.

"And yet, really, you're more of a victim of circumstances."

"Forgetting all the sideplay, I'm a prisoner," I told him curtly. "Let's face a few facts, Thorndyke, and stop tossing this guff."

"All right," he said shortly. "The facts are these: We would prefer that you help us willingly. We'd further prefer to have you as you are. That is, un-reoriented mentally."

"You couldn't afford to trust me," I grunted.

"Maybe we can. It's no secret that we've latched on to quite a number of your friends. Let's assume that they will all be well-treated if you agree to join us willingly."

"I'm sure that the attitude of any of my friends is such that they'd prefer me to stand my ground rather than betray their notions of right and wrong," I told him.

"That's a foolish premise," he replied. "You could no more prevail against us than you could,

single-handedly, overthrow the Government. Having faced that fact, it becomes sound and sensible to accept the premise and then see what sort of niche you can carve out of the new order."

"I don't like your new order," I grunted.

"Many people will not," he admitted. "But then, people do not really know what's good for them."

I almost laughed at him. "Look," I said, "I'd rather make my own ignorant mistakes than to have some Great Father supervise my life. And speaking of fathers, we've both got to admit that God Himself permits us the complete freedom of our wills."

Thorndyke sneered at me. "If we're to quote the Scripture," he said sourly, "I'll point out that 'The Lord Thy God is a jealous God, visiting His wrath even upon seven generations of those who hate Him'."

"Granted," I replied calmly, "But whether we love him or hate him is entirely up to our own particular notion. Now—"

"Cornell, stop talking like an idiot. Here, too, you can take your choice. I'm not ordering you. I'm just trying to point out that whether you go on suffering or enjoying life is entirely your own decision. And also, your decision will help or hinder others."

"You're entirely too Godlike," I

told him.

"Well," he said. "think it over."

"Go to hell!"

"Now, that's a very weak response," he said loftily. "Doing nobody any good or harm. Just talk. So stop gabbing and think."

Thorndyke left me with my thoughts. Sure, I had bargaining power, but it was no good. I'd be useful only until they discovered some method of innoculating normal flesh with Mekstrom's Disease, and once that was taken care of, Steve Cornell would be a burden upon their resources.

So that was the morning of my third day of incarceration and nothing more took place all day. They didn't even give me anything to read, and I almost went nuts. You have no idea of how long fourteen hours can be until you've been sitting in a cell with absolutely nothing to do. I exercised by chinning myself on the bars and playing gymnastics. I wanted to run but there was not enough room. The physical thrill I got out of being able to chin myself with one hand wore off after a half hundred pull-ups because it was no great feat for a Mekstrom. I did push-ups and bridges and other stunts until I was bored again.

And all the while, my thinking section was going around and around. The one main point that I

kept coming back to was a very unpleasant future to face:

It was certain that no matter what I did, nor how I argued, I was going to help them out. Either I would do it willingly or they'd grow tired of the lecture routine and take me in for a mental re-evaluation, after which (Being not-Steve Cornell any more) I'd join their ranks and do their bidding. About the only thing I could look at with self-confidence was my determination to hold out. If I was going to join them, it would be after I were no longer the man I am, but reoriented into whatever design they wanted. And that resolve was weakened by the normal human will to live. You can't make a horse drink the water you've led him to, but you can lead a human being to a well and he will drink it dry if you keep a shotgun pointed in his direction.

And so it ended up with my always wondering if, when the cards were all dealt out face up, whether I would have the guts to keep on saying 'No' right up to the point where I walked into their department of brain-washing. In fact, I was rather afraid that in the last moment I'd weaken, just to stay being me.

That uncertainty of mine was, of course, just the idea they wanted to nourish in my mind. They were doing it by leaving me alone

with my mental merry-go-round.

A GAIN I hit the sack out of sheer boredom and I turned and tossed for what seemed like hours before I dropped off to sleep, wondering and dreaming about who was to be the next visitor with a bill of goods to sell.

The next visitor came in about midnight, or thereabouts. I woke up with the realization that someone had come in through the outer door and was standing there in the semi-dark caused by a bright moon shining in through my barred window.

"Steve," she said, in a near whisper.

"Go away," I told her. "Haven't you done enough already?"

"Oh, please, Steve. I've got to talk to you."

I sat on the edge of my bunk and looked at her. She was fully dressed; her light printed silk was of the same general pattern and fit that she preferred. In fact, Catherine looked as I'd always seen her, and as I'd pictured her during the long hopeless weeks of our separation.

"You've got something to add?" I asked her coldly.

"I've got to make you understand, Steve," she pleaded.

"Understand what?" I snapped. "I know already. You deliberately set out to seduce, marry, or else-

how tie some emotional cable on to me. God knows that you succeeded. If it hadn't been for that accident, I'd have been nailed down tight."

"That part is true," she whispered.

"Tell me," I asked with what I hoped to be a bright and brittle voice, "did you folks set a quantity of nubile tomatoes on my trail with a prize for the successful one, or did you have the world of self-confidence in your own ability?"

"That's cruel, Steve."

"Seems fitting," I replied shortly.

"I suppose I deserve that," she said with a slight lift of her head. "At least, from your standpoint."

"Naturally, you've got justification."

"Well, I have."

"So has any burglar."

She shook her head at me. "Steve, you don't really understand. If only you could read my mind and know the truth—"

She let this trail off in a helpless awkwardness. It was one of those statements that are meaningless because it can be said by either friend or foe and cannot be checked.

I just looked at her and suddenly remembered something:

This was the first time in my life that I was in a position to do some verbal fencing with a tele-

path on even terms. I could say 'Yes' and think 'No' with absolutely impunity. In fact, I might even have had an edge, since as a 'poor non-telepath' I did have some slight training in subterfuge, falsehood, and diplomatic maneuver that the telepath couldn't have. Catherine and I, at long last, were in the position of the so-called good old days when boys and girls couldn't really know the truth about one another's real thoughts.

"So what's this truth?" I demanded.

"Steve, answer me truly. Have you ever been put on an odious job, only to find that the job is really rather pleasant?"

"Yes."

"Then hear me out. I—in fact, any woman — does not take kindly to being directed to do what I did. I was told to meet you, to marry —" her face looked flustered and it might have been a bit flushed for all I knew. I couldn't see color enough in the dim light to be sure. "— And then I met you, Steve, and I found out that you were really a very nice sort of guy."

"Well, thanks."

"Don't be bitter. Hear the truth. If Otto Mekstrom had not existed, if there were no such thing as Mekstrom's Disease, and I had met you freely and openly as men

and women meet, I'd have come to feel the same, Steve. I must make you understand that my emotional attachment to you was not increased nor decreased by the fact that my physical actions were directed at you. If anything, my job was just rendered pleasantly easier."

I grunted. "And so you were made happy."

"Yes," she whispered. "And I was going to marry you and live honestly with you—"

"Hell of a marriage with the wife in The Medical Center for Mekstrom's Disease and our first child—"

"Steve, you poor fool, don't you understand? If our child came as predicted, the first thing I'd do would be to have the child inoculate the father? Then we'd be—"

"Um," I grunted. "I hadn't thought of that." This was a flat lie. I'd considered it a-plenty since my jailing here. Present The Medical Center with a child, a Mekstrom, and a Carrier, and good old pappy would be no longer needed.

"Well, after I found out all about you, Steve, that's what I had in mind. But now—"

"Now what?" I urged her gently. I had a hunch that she was leading up to something, but ducking shy about it until she managed to find out how I thought.

It would have been all zero if we'd been in a clear area, but as it was I led her gently on.

"But now I've failed," she said with a slight wail.

"What do they do with failures?" I asked harshly. "Siberia? Or a gunny sack weighed down with an anvil? Or do they drum you out of the corps?"

"I don't know."

I eyed her closely. I was forced to admit that no matter how Catherine thought, she was a mighty attractive dish from the physical standpoint. And regardless of the trouble she'd put me through, I could not overlook the fact that we had been deep enough in love to plan elopement and marriage. I'd held her slender body close, and either her response had been honestly warm or Catherine was an actress of very rare physical ability. Scholar Phelps could hardly have picked a warmer temptress in the first place; putting her onto me now was a stroke of near-genius.

I got up from the edge of my bunk and faced her through my bars. She came close, too, and we looked into each other's faces over a cross-rail of the heavy fence.

I managed a wistful grin at her. "You're not really a failure yet, are you, kid?"

"I don't quite know how to—

to—" she replied.

I looked around my little cell with a gruesome gesture. "This isn't my idea of a pleasant home. And yet it will be my home until someone decides that I'm too expensive to keep."

"I know," she breathed.

Taking the bit in my teeth, I said, "Catherine, even though—well, hell. I'd like to help you."

"You mean that?" she asked in almost an eager voice.

"It's not possible to forget that we were eloping when all this started."

"It all seems so long ago," she said with a thick voice. "And I wish we were back there—no, Steve, I wish Mekstrom's Disease had never happened—I wish—"

"Stop wishing and think," I told her half-humorously. "If there were no Mekstrom's Disease, the chances are that we'd never have met in the first place."

"That's the cruel part of it all," she cried. And I mean *cried*.

I rapped on the metal bars with a fist. "So here we are," I said unhappily. "Hell, I can't help you now, Catherine."

She put her hands through the bars and held my face between them. She looked searchingly into my eyes, as if straining to force her blocked telepath sense through the deadness of the area. She leaned against the steel but the bar-

rier was very effective; it blocked any real physical contact between us. I put my hands through, below the cross-bar girder and once more I felt that warm slender waist between my palms. Her body beneath the sheer silk of her dress was lithe and yielding. Her curves flattened against the cruel bars as I pulled her towards me and our lips met through the cold metal. It was a very unsatisfactory kiss because we had to purse our lips like a pair of piccolo players to make them meet. It was sort of like making love through a key-hole.

This unsatisfactory lovemaking did not last long. She leaned back, arching her back against the pressure of my hands on her waist. Unsteadily, Catherine said, "I want you, Steve."

Inwardly I grinned, and then with the same feeling as if I'd laughed out loud at a funeral, I said, "Through these steel bars?"

She stopped short as if I'd thrown ice water on her emotions. She slipped out of my hands and moved back. One hand went down in the hollow between her breasts and came up with a little cylindrical key. With one heavy-lidded look at me, she went to a brass wall plate beside the outer door, inserted the key, and turned. The sliding door to my cell opened on noiseless machined slides.

THEN with a careful look at me, Catherine slipped a little shutter over the glass bull's eye in the door. Her hand reached up to a hidden toggle above the door and as she snapped it, a thick cover surged out above the speaker, television lens, and microphone grille, curved down, and shut off the tell-tales with a cushioned sound. Apparently the top management of the joint used these cells for other things than mere containment of unruly prisoners and did not want witnesses. I almost grinned; the society that Scholar Phelps proposed was not the kind that flourished in an atmosphere of trust, privacy, or even personal modesty — except for the top brass.

Catherine turned from her switch plate and came across the floor with her face lifted and her lips parted, ripe and full and willing. Her arms were raising languidly to slip around my neck in a lover's embrace. Her breasts rose and fell, straining against the silk of her dress as her breath came deep and rapid; then they touched my bare chest as Catherine started to settle herself comfortably in my arms.

"Hold me, Steve. Love me—"

My hand came forward in a short jab that caught her dead center in the plexus below the ribs. Her breath caught in one strangled gasp and her eyes went glassy. She

swayed stiffly in half-paralysis. My other hand came up, closing as it rose, until it became a fist that connected in a shoulder-jarring wallop on the side of her jaw. Her head snapped up and her knees caved in. She folded from the hips and went down bonelessly. From her throat came the bubbly sound of air being forced painfully through a flaccid wet tube.

I snatched my clothing and jumped outside of the cell barrier because I was certain that they had some means of closing the cell from a master control center. I don't know much about penology, but that's the way I'd do it. I was half-surprised that I'd been able to get away with this much; but I was not so stunned that it prevented me from dressing like a fireman answering a four alarm blaze.

Catherine stirred and moaned, and I stopped long enough to take the key out of the wall plate. The cell door closed on its silent slides.

I had hardly been able to more than run the zipper up my shirt when the outer door opened and I had to dance like a fool to get behind it. The door admitted a flood of bright light from the corridor, and Dr. James Thorndyke.

Thorndyke came in behind a large automatic clutched in one nervous fist. He strained his eyes at the gloom that was not cut by the ribbon of light. He had been

muttering sourly to himself when the door came open, so all I caught was:

"—not enough time for a jack-rabbit—"

And then I cut him off with a solid slice of my right hand to the base of his neck. I remembered to jump off the ground as the blow went home; there was a sickening crunch of bone and muscle as Thorndyke caved forward to the floor. He dropped the gun, luckily, as his body began to twitch and kick spasmodically as the life drained out of him.

I re-swallowed a mouthful of bitter bile as I reached down to pick up his gun. Then the room got hot and unbearably small and I felt a frantic urge to leave, to close the door upon that sight.

CHAPTER XXV

I was yards away from my door before my panic left me. Then I remembered where and who I was and took a fast look around. There was no one else in the corridor, of course, or I would not have been able to cut and run as I had. But I looked around anyway until my reasoning power told me that I had done little to help my position.

Like the canary, my plans for escape ended once I was outside of my cage. I literally did not know

what to do with my new-found freedom. One thing was becoming painfully obvious; I'd be pinned down tight once I put a foot outside of the dead area in which this building was constructed. What I needed was friends, arms, ammunition, and a good, solid plan of escape. I had neither; unless you call my jailed friends such help. And there I could not go; the tell-tales would give me away to the master control center before I could raise my small— and unarmed— army.

So I stood there in the brightly lighted corridor and tried to think. I got nowhere, but I was driven to action again by the unmistakable sound of the elevator at the end of the corridor.

I eyed the various cell doors with suspicion; opening any but an empty room would cause some comment from the occupant, which again would give me away. Nor did I have time to canvass the joint by peeking into the one-way bull's eyes, peering into a semi-gloom to see which room was empty.

So instead of hiding in the corridor, I sloped towards the elevator and the stairwell that surrounded it, hoping that I could make it before the elevator rose to my floor. I know that my passage must have sounded like a turbojet in full flight, but I made the stairway and took a headlong leap down

the first short flight of stairs just as the elevator door rolled open. I hit the wall with a bumping crash that jarred my senses, but I kept my feet and looked back up the stairs.

I caught a flash of motion; a guard sauntering past the top of the well, a cigarette in one hand and a lazy-looking air about him. He was expecting no trouble, and so I gave him none.

I crept up the stairs and poked my head out just at the floor level.

The guard, obviously confident that nothing, but nothing, could ever happen in this welded metal crib, jauntily peered into a couple of the rooms at random, took a long squint at the room I'd recently vacated, and then went on to the end of the hall where he stuck a key in a signal-box. On his way back he paused again to peer into my room, straining to see if he could peer past the little shutter over the bull's eye. Then he made a lewd gesture, shrugged unhappily, and started to return.

I loped down the stairs to the second floor and waited. The elevator came down, stopped, and the guard repeated his desultory search, not stopping to pry into any darkened rooms.

Just above the final, first-floor flight, I stopped and sprawled on the floor with only my head and the nose of my gun over the top

step. Below was the guard's desk and standing beside the desk with anger in every line of his ugly face was Scholar Phelps!

The elevator came down, stopped, and the guard walked out, to be nailed by Phelps:

"Your job," snapped the good scholar coldly, "says you are to walk."

"Well, er— sir — it's — "

"Walk!" stormed Phelps angrily. "You can't cover that stairway in the elevator, you fumbling idiot."

"But sir—"

"Someone could easily come down while you go up."

"I know that, sir, but—"

"Then why do you disobey?" roared Phelps.

"Well, you see, sir, I know how this place is built and no one has ever made it yet. Who could?" The guard looked mystified.

Phelps had to face that fact. He did not accept it gracefully. "My orders are orders," he said stiffly. "You'll follow them. To the last letter."

"Yes sir. I will."

"See that you do. Now, I'm going up. I'll ride and you walk. Meet me on the fourth and bring the elevator down with you."

"Yessir."

I sloped upstairs like a scared rabbit. Up to the third again

where I moved down the corridor and slipped into the much-too-thin niche made by a door. Stolidly the guard came up the stairs, crossed in front of the elevator with his back to me, turned the far corner and went on up to the fourth.

As his feet started up the stairs, I was behind him; by the time he reached the top, I was half way up.

Phelps said, "Now, from this moment on, Waldron, you'll follow every order to the absolute letter. And when I ring, don't make the error of bringing the elevator. Send it. It'll come up and stop without a pilot."

"Yes sir. I'm sorry sir. But you understand, sir, there isn't really much to guard, sir."

"Then guard nothing. But guard it well, because a man in your position is gauged in success by the amount of boredom he creates for himself."

The guard started down and I darted up to poke my head out to see where Phelps was going. As I neared the floor level, I had a shock like someone hurling twenty gallons of ice water in my face. The top floor was the end of the dead area, and I — — pulled my head down into the murk like a diver taking a plunge.

Phelps was perceptive and it stood to reason that he'd be a good one. In fact, I guessed that our

range might be about equal under this present circumstance, where I could dig the entire bulk of his body while only my scalp had poked above the irregularity of the dead zone boundary. I couldn't take that chance. He'd dig me for fair and then all hell would be out for a midnight snack — on me.

So I stood there making like a guppy with my head, sounding out the boundary of that deadness, ducking down as soon as the mental murk gave me a faint perception of the wall and ceiling above me. Then I'd move aside and sound it again. Eventually I found a little billowing furrow that rose above the floor level and I crawled out along the floor, still sounding and moving cautiously with my body hidden in the deadness that rose and fell like the cloud of murky mental smoke that it appeared to my sense of perception.

I must have looked silly to any witness; wallowing along the floor like a porpoise acting furtive in the bright lights.

But then I couldn't go any further; the deadness sank below the floor level and left me looking along a bare floor that was just as bare to my sense of perception.

I shoved my head out of the dead zone and took a fast dig, then dropped back in again and lay there re-constructing what I'd perceived mentally. I did it the second

time and the third; each time making a rapid scan of some portion of that fourth floor.

In three fast swings, I collected a couple of empty offices, a very complete hospital set-up operating room, and a place that looked like a consultation theatre.

On my fourth scan, I whipped past Scholar Phelps, who was apparently deep in some personal interest.

I rose at once and strode down the hall and snapped the door open just as Phelps' completely unexpected mind grasped the perceptive fact that someone was coming down his hallway wearing a great big forty-five automatic.

"Freeze!" I snapped.

"Put that weapon down, Mr. Cornell. It, nor its use, will get your freedom."

"Maybe all I want out of life is to see you leave it," I told him.

"You'd not be that foolish, I'm sure," he said.

"I might."

He laughed, with all the self-confidence in the world. "Mr. Cornell, you have too much will to live. You're not the martyr type."

"I might turn out to be the cornered-rat type," I told him seriously. "So play it cagey, Phelps."

"Scholar Phelps, please."

"I wouldn't disgrace the medical profession," I told him. "So—"

"So what do you propose to do

about this?"

"I'm getting out."

"Don't be ridiculous. One step out of this building and you'll return within a half minute. How did you get out?"

"I was seduced out. Now—"

"I'd advise you to surrender; to stop this hopeless attempt; to put that weapon down. You cannot escape. There are others in this building who are your mental and intellectual superiors whose incarceration bear me witness."

I eyed him coldly and quietly. "I'm not convinced. I'm out. And if you could take a dig below you'd see a dead man and an unconscious woman to bear me witness. I broke your Dr. Thorndyke's neck with a chop of my bare hand, Phelps; I knocked Catherine cold with a fist. This thing might not kill you, but I'm a Mekstrom, too, and so help me I can cool you down but good."

"Violence will get you nothing."

"Try my patience. I'll bet my worthless hide on it." Then I grinned at him. "Or, it isn't so worthless, is it?"

"One cry from me, Mr. Cornell, and—"

"And you'll not live to see what happens. I've killed once tonight. I didn't like it. But the idea is not as new now as it was then. I'll kill you, Phelps, if for no other rea-

son than merely to keep my word."

With a sneer, Phelps turned to his desk and I stabbed my perception behind the papers and stuff to the call button; then I launched myself across the room like a rocket, swinging my gun hand as I soared. The steel caught him on the side of the head and drove him back from his call button before his finger could press it. Then I let him have a fist in the belly because the pistol swat hadn't much more than dazed him. The fist did it. He crumpled in a heap and fought for breath unconsciously.

I turned to the wall he'd been eyeing with so much attention.

There was row upon row of small kine tubes, each showing the dark interior of a cell. Below each was a row of pilot lights, all dark.

On his desk was a large bank of push buttons, a speaker, and a microphone. And beside the push button set-up was a ledger containing a list of names with their cell numbers.

I found Marian Harrison; pushed her button, and heard her ladylike snore from the speaker. A green lamp winked under one of the kine tubes and I walked over and looked into the darkened cell to see her familiar hair sprawled over a thin pillow.

I went to the desk and snapped on the microphone.

"Marian," I said "MARIAN!

HEY! MARIAN HARRISON!"

In the picture tube there was a stir, then she sat up and looked around in a sort of daze.

"Marian, this is Steve Cornell, but don't—"

"Steve!"

"—cry out," I finished uselessly.

"Where are you?" she asked in a whisper.

"I'm in the con room."

"But how on Earth—?"

"No time to gab. I'll be down in a rush with the key. Get dressed!"

"Yes, Steve."

I took off in a headlong rush with the 'Hotel Register' in one hand. I made the third floor and Marian's cell in slightly more than nothing flat, but she was ready when I came barging into her room. She was out of the cell before it hit the backstop and following me down the hall towards her brother's room.

"What happened?" she asked breathlessly.

"Later," I told her. I opened Phillip Harrison's cell. "You go wake up Fred Macklin and tell him to come here. Then get the Macklin girl— Alice, it says here — and the pair of you wake up others and start sending 'em up stairs. I'll call you on the tell-tale as soon as I can."

Marian took off with the key

and the register and I started to shake Phillip Harrison's shoulder. "Wake up!" I cried. "Wake up, Phillip!"

Phillip made a noise like a baby seal.

"Wake up!"

"Wha— ?"

"It's Steve Cornell. Wake up!"

WITH a rough shake of his head, Phillip groaned and unwound himself out of a tangle of bedclothing. He looked at me through half-closed glassy eyes. Then he straightened and made a perilous course to the washstand where he sopped a towel in cold water and applied it to his face, neck, and shoulders. When he dropped the towel in the sink, his expression was fresher and his eyes were mingled curiosity and amazement. "What gives?" he asked, starting to dress in a hurry.

"I busted out, slugged Scholar Phelps, and took over the master control room. I need help. We can't keep it long unless we move fast."

"Yeah man. Any moving will be fast after this," he said sourly.

"Got any plans?"

"We've—"

The door opened to let Fred Macklin enter. He carried his shirt and had been dressing on the run. "What goes on?" he said.

"Look," I said quickly, "If I

have to stop and give anybody a rundown, we'll have no time to do what has to be done. There are a couple of sources of danger. One is the guard down at the bottom of the stairway. The other is the possible visitor. You get a couple of other young, ambitious fellows and push that guard post over, but quick."

"Right. And you?"

"I've got to keep our hostage cold," I snapped. "And I'm running the show by virtue of being the guy that managed to bust loose."

"But how?" demanded Phillip, just before he took off.

"I sort of got seduced out of jail," I told him.

In the hallway there was movement, but I left it to head back to Scholar Phelps. I got there in time to hear him groan and make scratching noises on the carpet. I took no chances; I cooled him down with a short jab to the pit of the stomach and doubled him over again.

He was sleeping painfully but soundlessly when Marian came in. I turned to her. "You're supposed to be waking up—"

"I gave the key and the register to Jo Anne Tweedy," she said. "Jo Anne's the brash young teenager you took a bump with in Ohio. She's competent, Steve. And she's got the Macklin twins to help her.

Waking up the camp is a job for the junior division." She eyed the recumbent Phelps distastefully. "What have you in mind for him?"

"He's valuable," I said. "We'll use him to buy our freedom."

"Think it—"

The door opened again, interrupting Marian. It was Jonas Harrison. He stood there in the frame of the door and looked at us with a sort of grim smile. I had never met the old patriarch of the Harrison Family before, but he lived up to my every expectation. He stood tall and straight; topped by a wealth of snow white hair, white eyebrows, and the touch of a white moustache. His eyes contrasted with the white; a rich and startling brown.

This was a man to whom I could hand the basic problem of engineering our final escape; Jonas Harrison was capable of plotting an airtight getaway.

His voice was rich and resonant; it had a lift in its tone that sounded as though his self-confidence had never been in danger of a setback: "Well, son, you seem to have accomplished quite a job this night. What shall we do next?"

"Get the devil out of here," I replied—

—wondering just exactly how I'd known so instantly that this was Jonas Harrison. The rich and resonant voice had flicked a sub-

surface recollection on a faint, raw spot and now something important was swimming around in the mire of my mind trying to break loose and come clear.

I turned from the sword-sharp brown eyes and looked at Marian. She was almost as I had first seen her: Not much makeup if any at all, her hair free of fancy dressing but neat, her legs were bare and healthy-tanned; they tapered into slender ankles that were enhanced by her slippers. And if the wash-cotton dress she wore was not the same as her wash-faded shorts and the bra-halter top that was too heavy for underwear and too thin for polite society, the wash-faded cotton dress was of the same general type. I looked at her, and then for the wink of an eye her image faded like a montage and I saw Catherine in her printed silk. Then Catherine went and Marian stood there before me once more.

No, this was no trick of the mind; no one was playing games. This montage had been part of that recollection that was still trying to make solid contact and getting closer to the surface at every sensory impression.

So now my attention was caught by the glint of a slender gold chain that Marian wore. Like a single bright light in a dark room, it held

my gaze in a solid grip. My eyes followed the two strands from where they came into sight at her throat down across the faint swell of her collarbones, and down across her breast until the chain disappeared beneath the round neckline of her dress.

Then without my will, my perception took over and followed the converging strands down to the hollow between her breasts.

Part of my mind said: *Steve, stop it for God's Sake!* but a larger and more important part beat down my sense of personal propriety and snapped: *But I have got to know!*

My eyes flicked up to her face in a quick glance; I felt like a miscreant taking a fast look to see whether his misdeeds are being watched. But there was no sign of the outraged privacy nor anger on her face. Instead there was a look of softness, and maybe even a tint of pride.

Forgive me, my dear, I thought.

Her eyes lowered from mine, and I could almost feel her urging me to dig deep and be certain.

I could not have stopped even if she had demanded it; even if the people in the room—and it was filling rapidly now—resented my probing and tried to make me stop by physical intervention.

For nestling warm between her breasts at the end of that slender

chain was a ring. A modest diamond in a plain and delicate setting. The perception was whole and complete. It shaped in my mind like a stereo image that I turned for close perception. The details were so clear that I could even receive the near-microscopic engraving.

SC-MH

And then the subsurface recollection came up into the conscious part of my mind in a flood of memories and recalled thoughts. They flowed in a cascade like the parts of a jigsaw puzzle pouring from an overturned box, landing all in place like a process-shot motion picture. Gaps and inconsistencies filled out and smoothed over and I became peacefully aware of having finally achieved some measure of completion.

I opened my eyes and looked Marian full in the face. She stood with a half-smile on her face, her eyes bright and happily wet. She seemed almost poised to take the half step that separated us, but I took that half step first. With an intimacy that could only have been created out of a long previous intimacy, I slipped the ring up and out, broke the chain in my fingers, and held the ring in my right hand.

"Marian," I asked hoarsely, "Will you wear it again?"

"Yes, Steve. If you want me."

I slipped the ring back on her finger and kissed it. Marian came into my arms with a happy little sigh and settled herself against me. This time it was for keeps, never again would we be separated. Never again would I be faced with reorientation.

Jonas Harrison said, "Steve, there's too much to say, right now, to say it well or to possibly make you understand. Just remember that to our limited knowledge of that time, Mekstrom's Disease was very rare and always fatal. So when Marian contracted it, we all knew that we were going to face a period of pain and sheer hell and then a lifetime of regretful memory. It was Marian herself who insisted that you, at least, could be spared that. So I erased her from your mind, Steve. Do you see? I cannot apologize for having done what we all believed to be a merciful deed. Even though subsequent events changed our lives greatly, you were denied our companionship because normal human and Mekstrom can hardly have a pleasant life together. If any apology is necessary, the most I can offer is that I regret that it was necessary to tamper with your mind in order to ease your mind of its almost-certain grief. It could not be done otherwise—"

"Apologize hell!" I cried, looking at him over Marian's shoulder.

"You've given us the answer!"

"Answer?" he blurted, and then he must have whipped through my mind fast because comprehension dawned on his determined face. Marian leaned back in my arms to look into my eyes. "Steve," she cried, "It's simply got to work!"

Nurse Farrow muttered, "He'll have to be conscious, of course," and went into the consultation room to fiddle with a cabinet full of medical tools.

Howard Macklin and Jonas Harrison went into a deep telepathic conference that was interrupted briefly when Jonas Harrison said to Phillip, "You've got to provide us with uninterrupted time," and then Marian started to propel me out of the room, telling me, "You help him, Steve. What we've got to do is nothing for a non-telepath to watch."

Outside, Phillip threatened me with the guard's signal-box key. "Mind telling a poor non-telepath what the devil is going on?"

I smiled. "It's all very simple," I said. "They're going to reorient Scholar Phelps. And if your father has the mental equipment to erase Marian from my mind, he has what it takes to brain-wash the spiderwebs out of Phelps' mind. Then once they get that finished, we start down from the top, one by one and echelon by echelon. With the reoriented ones helping out,

we'll clean up this crummy joint in an ever-widening circle until The Medical Center can be allied with The Highways In Hiding. Then, Phillip, we can all start doing a real service for the human race!"

THERE is little left to tell. The Highways In Hiding are seeking out and helping the innocent victims of Mekstrom's Disease and The Medical Center handles the hospitalization and cure. I'm busy innoculating the families of the victims so that they'll not be parted.

We're still underground for two reasons. One of them is that we are no closer to a fast inoculation than we ever were; the other is simply a matter of logistics. It would mean disaster to have three quarters or more of The United States or the World all immobilized with Mekstrom's Disease. So even if we get a means, we'd have to approach this inoculation process slowly and sensibly. So please wait your turn and don't follow one of our Highways In Hiding unless you have trouble.

We'll get around to all of you in due time. It may take a couple of generations, but it will come.

Because Steve Junior was born a Mekstrom Carrier one month ago today, and Marian and I have further plans.

THE END

PROBLEM PLANET

by

Russ Winterbotham

A spacewreck presents many complications not in the rule book. Take survival—it's quite a basic instinct—but to some, so is politics!

QUIBBLERS may shove dictionaries in my face till the end of the universe and I will always maintain that almost anything you can name is a matter of good luck or bad. Every great man owes his success to luck of some sort. What made him great is what he did with his luck after he got it.

Had I been born eleven years before Senator Clive Littlebrook, I might have been brilliant to the point of stupidity, as he was. Nobody planned that I should be 24 when he was 35, and a space pilot instead of a senator. He had eleven years to get smarter than me. But all of his brilliance and all of my youthful innocence couldn't have prevented our being spacewrecked on a lonely, uninhabited planet. We knew it was lonely and thought it was unin-

habited, as it almost was. It was the second planet of an unimportant sun, Yuga 16, which lay unexpectedly in our path through hyperspace while I drove him to an important committee meeting on Arcturus III. As a result I had to dump our fuel to alter our mass in order to avoid a direct collision. And naturally there was nothing else to do but land on II Yuga 16.

So we were marooned and even if our radio had been powerful enough to send out an S O S it would take years for our message to get anywhere.

Clive was philosophical about it. After cussing me for three hours, he decided that we'd better make the best of our situation. We could fight when we had less important things to do.

"I have always maintained," he said, "that even in its smallest



detail, a human settlement must be political. And I've also believed that politics must be designed to fit environment."

He always talked like that, so I wasn't particularly impressed till he had talked a few minutes more, expanding his point.

"—so on this planet we will have a one-party, autocratic rule. I will be the head of the government, and you will be my constituency."

"Huh?"

"It is perfectly clear. Dave," said Clive. "I have had experience

in political matters, therefore I'm more suited to governing the planet. You follow my orders and do all the work, and I'll do the planning and thinking."

These might not have been his exact words, but that was what he said. I was mad enough to want to sock him right there. But I knew that we might get rescued someday and he could throw his weight around almost anywhere. The only time I had the authority to shove Clive Littlebrook around was when he was a passenger on my spaceship, which he certainly wasn't now.

"The first thing to do will be to find shelter, food and water," he said.

"Don't be silly," I said, "we've got all those things on our spaceship."

"We don't know how long we'll be here," said Clive. "Since the supplies on our ship are limited, we must try to be self-supporting."

I've always liked that fable about the oak and the willow trees. One was big and strong, the other wasn't, but the willow tree lasted longest because it bent and swayed before the wind. So with Senator Clive Littlebrook, I made like a willow tree. I humored him.

I started out to explore the spot where our ship landed. A

couple of miles away were some rolling hills, covered with trees. Since we had seen a number of small animals, I figured there would be game there, probably water too.

Clive came with me, not to explore, but because he couldn't order me around at long distance and there's nothing worse to a politician than not being able to do any politicking. I was stuck with him.

We hit a jackpot. Not only was there a clear stream running through a valley in the hills, but there was an abundance of small game. And there was a ruined city.

Sometime in the past, this planet had been inhabited. Then something happened. Epidemic, war, famine, drought or something we didn't know about had wiped out the intelligent life to a man. This had happened so long ago that even the bones had turned to dust. But the shell of his cities remained.

"Too bad," said Clive, "this is going to make your task more difficult."

"Why?"

"You'll have the added duties of being the police force, the sanitary commission and the city council," he said.

"But there's no need for those things," I protested. "There's no-

body to govern."

"You will also have to be the populace."

I could see that I was going to have the splittingest personality in the galaxy.

"We'll also have to establish a monetary system," Clive went on. "Unless there's trade, our city will perish."

"That's one thing we don't have to do," I said. We had been standing in the stone framework of a building and I had kicked a pile of dust with the toe of my boot. Under the dust was a mound of square, flat objects of gold. Coins.

"We've already got money."

Clive pounced on them. "My word," he explained. "We're wealthy!"

"Nuts," I said. "What can you buy with it?"

"It's gold," he said. "There may be a bank in these ruins!"

"You were talking awhile ago about food, shelter and water," I said. "We've got the shelter and water, but we still got to have food, unless we want those little rabbits for a steady diet." The animals weren't rabbits, but they were about rabbit-size.

"We've got to have economics," said Clive. "I'll pay you for all the food you bring in, and you can buy your food from me."

It sounded crazy, but I made like a willow again.

In order for him to have enough money to pay me to work, I had to find a bank. A good candidate seemed to be a building larger than the others that nestled against a hillside, surrounded by trees. It had a facade supported by fluted columns and it was in pretty good shape since the hill probably sheltered it from a lot of the weather that had taken such a toll from the other buildings.

With Clive at my heels, I went inside. It was light, since the roof had rotted away. It was a temple with a hollow square sacrificial altar in the center of a large hall. And it was better than a bank.

Scattered everywhere were gold coins, such as we had already found. In addition there were bars of blackened silver, glass jugs filled with precious stones, solid gold candlesticks, ornaments and jewelry.

"You will be well paid, my subject," said Clive. "People of every planet in the universe will envy the people of this planet."

"What's the name of our planet, by the way?" I asked.

The answer came in a different voice: "Up to now it's been Lonesome."

I had my hands full of coins, but as I heard the voice they slipped out of my fingers and fell to the stone floor with a clanking

sound. I wheeled around and in the red sunlight that streamed through the broken roof, I saw a human figure. A woman.

At first I thought she was smiling, and then I saw that her lips were grim and tense. What made her look more formidable than anything was what she held in her hand. A large-size, old fashioned thirty-eight on a forty-five frame.

She wasn't the ghost of a vanished race. She was real, from the top of her wavy, black hair, to the crude hand-made sandals on her feet. Her eyes were soft and brown, but they glinted like the flash of polished steel. Her figure was well proportioned and graceful in its curves, but there was no mistaking hardened muscles. Her clothing, which included shorts and a sack-like blouse, seemed to have been woven from grass fibers, and animal skins.

I got tired of trying to watch the gun and her curves at the same time, so I forgot about the gun, since she wasn't pulling the trigger.

"Yes," she said, "it used to be Lonesome, but now it looks like we'll have to call it the Problem Planet."

"Good heavens," said Dave. "A fifty-percent increase in population!"

"Let's not talk about increasing the population just yet," said the

girl. "Let's get acquainted." She smiled and it made her look lots nicer than when she was grim. She spoke to me. "Drop your pistol holster on the floor and then frisk your friend."

I'd been so used to acting like a willow that it was no trouble at all to obey. Besides, I figured it was only custom that made a king outrank a queen. On a new planet a little change might work wonders.

"My name's Rosemary," she said, when I had finished. "This is my planet and you're trespassing."

"Fiddlesticks," said Clive. "This is not your planet. I'll admit you might have squatters rights on a limited portion of it, but you can't possibly claim it all."

"Here's my deed," she said, waving the gun. "Who are you?"

"He's Senator Clive Littlebrook," I explained. "I'm Dave Campmain, a space pilot."

"I'm also the supreme court on this planet," said Clive, "and I'm handing down a decision right now. Your claim to the whole planet is invalid." While Rosemary looked as if she wanted to pull the trigger, he turned to me. "You're the clerk of the court, so write down my decision: State vs. Rosemary—uh, what's your last name, my dear?"

"None of your business," said Rosemary.

"Oh well," said Clive. "Adam and Eve didn't have last names, and until the population is heavier, we won't need last names here."

"Here it's going to be Eve and Adam—if things progress that far," said Rosemary.

"My dear," said Clive, "you must realize that you belong to the minority party. It will give us a chance to practice democracy in its simplest form. The first thing we'll vote on is disarmament. All in favor, say Aye!"

"Aye!" I said.

"All opposed. signify by the usual sign."

"No!" said Rosemary.

"I shall have to cast the deciding vote," said Clive. "In view of peaceful relations, I shall have to vote Aye." He smiled and extended his hand. "Give me the gun, my dear."

"No," said Rosemary.

"My dear, you are establishing a bad precedent. Your stand may lead to war later on. You wouldn't want the blood of millions to be on your head?"

"I don't want my blood to be on yours either," said Rosemary.

Clive turned to me. "Dave, as chief of the police, it is your duty to disarm the woman. She is violating the law by possessing fire-

arms."

"We won't harm you, Rosemary," I said. I could see her point of view, but on the other hand nobody likes to have a gun pointed at him.

"No," said Rosemary.

"Listen to reason," I said. "There are two of us and only one of you. Sooner or later you're going to have to sleep, while we can take turns sleeping. You can't keep that gun pointed at us forever. So you might as well be a good sport."

"Uh-uh," said Rosemary.

"My dear," said Clive, "you are an earthling, certainly your instincts must be for the democratic way of life. A gun speaks of tyranny."

It wasn't hard to figure she was an earthling. She spoke perfect English and a thirty-eight on a forty-five frame isn't found on other planets, unless earthmen brought them there. While I was curious about her origin, I figured that at the moment there were more important problems to solve.

This one looked near solution. As I recovered from my initial shock of seeing a beautiful girl pointing a gun at me, I noticed the gun more than I did at first. There were unmistakable signs of rust, and a rusty gun is often more dangerous to the shooter than to the shootee. It was so

rusty, in fact, that I doubted if it would fire.

So I simply stepped forward and grabbed it.

She seemed to have been waiting for this move. No sooner had I jerked the gun out of her hand, than she seized my wrists, turned, and pulled me over her shoulder in a snap mare. The next thing I knew, I had landed in a heap.

"Want to try two falls out of three?" she asked.

"No thanks," I said. I got up and examined my bruises.

"As long as Rosemary is disarmed," said Clive, "we'll go ahead with our plans for a democracy. The first step is a free election. I'll nominate myself for president and general manager of the planet."

"I'll nominate—" Rosemary began.

"Sorry," said Clive, "nominations are closed. Since there is no oppositon, I'll move and second that I'm elected unanimously. May I congratulate you on your wisdom, since I'm the only one of our group who has had political experience."

"Hey," I said, "aren't you pushing this thing a little fast?"

"It is necessary to establish a civilized government quickly," said Clive. "And I assure you, I'll

be bi-partisan in my government. I'll appoint you, Dave, as secretary of state, and you, Rosemary, as secretary of—hmm, let's see—how about secretary of labor?"

"No," said Rosmary.

Clive didn't seem to be upset. "Well, we must expect opposition from the minority party. It's your privilege to refuse the nomination."

"Comes the revolution," said Rosemary.

"I was hoping we'd have no subversion," said Clive, "but if there is, it will be dealt with promptly." He turned to me. "Now I think we'd better go about checking our national resources." He leaned over and picked up a handful of gold coins and stuffed them into his pocket. Then he helped himself to some diamonds, emeralds and rubies.

Rosemary turned on her heel and walked toward the door. When she reached it, she turned a moment: "When you get hungry, or need me, I'll be around." Then she was gone.

"That reminds me," said Clive. "We'd better look for food."

He stooped and picked his gun off the floor.

"Uh-uh," I said. "You ruled against armament."

Clive hesitated. "But we should protect ourselves against wild animals."

"Rosemary has been living here for quite a while, I said. "She admitted her gun was useless, so I don't think there are any dangerous animals. And I'm certainly not going to let her laugh at me by carrying a gun to protect myself from her, even—even if she is a lady wrestler."

Clive nodded. "I see your point. But if we leave the guns here, she may get them."

"I'll take care of that." I picked up both weapons and hunted till I found what probably had been a well. I dropped them into it, albeit with misgivings. Still, a woman's laughter is something that masculine pride would rather die than face. Women do laugh at men, but they do it politely, or where men can't hear them. Maybe Rosemary was laughing now.

Without the guns, though, we had a more difficult food problem. We would have to trap animals, or depend on fish, if fish existed in the stream that ran through the ruined city. And there were.

I sharpened a couple of sticks with my knife and we tried spearing fish. We decided that it would take a lot of skill, and probably days of practice. We'd have to weave some nets, and this would take time too. I was about to suggest that we go back to the spaceship and live on what we had, when Clive found a clam.

It was different from the terrestrial clam, in that it was almost egg-shaped, but there was no mistaking what it was. Presently Clive had dug up quite a pile of them from the stream and I had a little fire glowing under some stones. On top of the stones. I piled wet moss to steam the clams and I was just about ready to have a clam bake, when Clive started to groan.

"What's the matter?" I asked.

"I ate a clam," he said. "Raw. It-it's poisoning me!"

Presently he was lying on the ground, writhing.

I was trying to stick my fingers down his throat when Rosemary appeared. "He won't die," she said. "But I wouldn't advise eating those clams. Nearly all of the fish are poisonous. He'll be all right in a few minutes."

"What are we going to eat?" I asked. "Not that we're starving, but the supply of food on our spaceship won't last forever."

"I have a garden," said Rosemary, "and I've domesticated some livestock."

"My—uh—dear," said Clive, between groans. "I appoint you Secretary of Agriculture."

"Let's get some things straight," said Rosemary. "This planet is not going to be like the earth."

"But a democracy, my dear—"

"Okay, it's a democracy. I'm

not opposed to freedom of government, but there are a lot of things outside government that need changing. Back on earth, man is the dominant sex. On this planet, woman will be."

"But there are two men, only one woman," Clive said. He was breathing a little easier now and I judged he was recovering.

"All the more reason why woman should be dominant," said Rosemary. "I'm more valuable."

"We're stronger. Women must have men to protect them."

"Any time you want to test your theory that you're stronger than I am, I'm willing," said Rosemary. And she looked perfectly able to take care of herself. I didn't know then how long she had been on the planet, but she was hard as a rock. She'd taken care of herself in all kinds of weather, done everything a man could do in fighting against nature. Being a spaceman is no way to develop your biceps and neither is being a senator.

"Hmm," said Clive. "Perhaps there should be more equality between the sexes. But most of the things that women misinterpret are not discrimination, but adoration."

"I don't care what it was," said Rosemary. "and I didn't say anything about equality. Starting tomorrow, you boys will do what

I tell you to."

"But I'm the President!" Clive protested.

"And I'm the boss," said Rosemary.

We fixed up some of the better preserved buildings into houses.

We made tools out of sticks, stones, gold and silver. We trapped animals and domesticated them and we planted gardens and wove clothing out of grass and fur.

Rosemary showed us how to do most of the things and then left us to do them while she explored the ruins and dug up items that told how the vanished race lived.

"They were humanoid," she told us once. "I found a frieze that pictured the inhabitants. While the art was primitive, it was easy to see that they were a great deal like men. Probably their civilization would compare favorably with that of Rome in Caesar's time, although I haven't found much bronze. Probably they had iron which has rusted away. I still haven't found what killed them, but for that matter no one really knows what killed the dinosaur. It's probably due to the fact that there's a critical point in the development of any species, when that point is reached, the species dies."

"But man went farther on earth than here," I said.

"Sure, because the critical point on the earth is higher than on Problem planet." She paused, and added: "At least that's what my father thought."

"Your father?"

"Yes. He was an astro-archeologist," she explained. "He brought me here when I was a little girl, only twelve years old, and he died here. I've lived alone in this ruined city ever since."

"Didn't he have a spaceship?"

"Sure. But I didn't know how to run it."

"You mean it's still here? Can it operate?"

"I suppose so. I don't know anything about spaceships."

I almost yelled. "Why didn't you say so? We could have been on our way to civilization long ago!"

She nodded toward Clive "He's so happy here, being the President of Everything."

"Good heavens, girl!" I said, "Clive's a politician. He's got to have people. A whole planetful of people to really be happy. Right now he's—"

I stopped. Rosemary had tears in her eyes.

Clive had been busy grinding some nuts into a sort of flour and when he noticed Rosemary wiping her eyes, he rose and came

over to where I'd been weaving while I talked to her.

"What's the matter?" he asked.

I decided to break the news by easy stages. "Supposing we had a way to get off this planet. To go to the earth, or III Arcturus, or somewhere we could live like human beings again. Wouldn't you want to go?"

Clive laughed. "I've never had so much fun in my life," he said. "Here I'm everything I wanted to be. I've got a nice political boss, and I'm the chief executive of a whole planet. I'm also the Supreme Court and one third of the voters. I've got more wealth than a nabob, and no pressing appointments with people I don't like."

Rosemary looked up at him.

"You like me?"

"Certainly," Clive said. "Woman has always been the dominant sex—the stronger sex if you like. On earth she invented the idea that man was the Big Shot, but that was to keep men from being discontented. Equality of the sexes always has been a myth, but I didn't realize it until civilization was reduced to its simplest form."

"What about you, Dave?" Rosemary asked.

"Personally, I like life on easier terms," I said. "Not that it isn't pleasant here, but we have to work so hard. And we've been

lucky not to have had any real sickness, except for the time Clive ate a clam and that wasn't serious. But sooner or later were going to need the science of medicine. And if we don't need that, we're going to have to have something else that civilization has and we haven't. Furthermore, man is a gregarious animal. He may kid himself about how nice it would be to live on a desert island, but no matter how anti-social he is, he doesn't feel right without others around him. Even if it's only to be disagreeable with them."

"Isn't civilization a lot like the gold and precious stones in the temple?" asked Clive. "The stuff is no good unless we need it."

"But it's wrong to have useful things and not use them," I said. "It's miserly."

"Okay," said Clive. "But we have no other choice."

"But we have," Rosemary broke in. "I just told Dave that I have a spaceship. You can go away if you wish, or stay. It's up to you. I didn't tell you before, because I hadn't made up my own mind. Now I have."

"It's my mind that has to be made up," I said. "I'm the only one of us who can pilot a spaceship. No matter what you want to do, I've got quite a say in the matter."

Clive sat down on the ground beside me. "So you're the most important one. You're the king for a day. If we want to go back to civilization, you're the only one who can take us."

"Right," I said. "When we landed, you were top man because you were a big wheel. Right away Rosemary took the sceptre because she was a woman, and women are scarce. Now I'm President of Everything."

"It's a democracy," said Rosemary. "We'll vote on it."

"In view of the importance of the occasion, we should have a debate first," said Clive.

"You first, Dave," said Rosemary.

"Okay," I said. "We've shared everything and since you've both probably guessed it anyhow, I'll admit that I'm in love with Rosemary. She hasn't given me the chance to tell her alone, so I'll tell the world. Here I've got a 50-50 chance of getting her, maybe better, because I'm nearer her own age. But away from here the odds go down. I'll go if Rosemary goes, and if she'll have me. Otherwise, we'll stay. Maybe Clive and I will have to fight for you, Rosemary."

"You next, Clive," said Rosemary.

"If Rosemary goes with you, Dave," said Clive, "we'll fight."

We're about evenly matched. Perhaps you're a little younger, but I'm still in my prime and I've got experience. If Rosemary stays with me, and lets you go away, there'll be no fight. In either event, it looks like I'm stuck here, because I can't imagine you taking Rosemary and I back to civilization if you lost her."

I looked at Rosemary. "Your vote," I said.

"You see, Dave," she said, "I'm still the most important person on this planet. I can have almost anything happen, just by the decision I make."

"What is your decision?" asked Clive.

She looked at me, then at Clive. "You started out playing politics," she said. "and it all comes back to the same old thing. Man and woman. Maybe that's politics, because nations are based on the family. But we have proved one thing anyhow. Even in a civilization of only three people, each one has his moments of supremacy. And there must always be compromise, or bloodshed. If we stay, the compromise must be polyandry. I must accept both of you as mates. If we go, one of you must be compensated for losing me. Supposing one takes all the gold we can carry away, the other takes me?"

"If Clive will take the gold," I

said.

"If Dave will take the gold," said Clive.

"See?" she smiled. "Gold isn't the most important thing in the world. I'm much more valuable than all the gold you can ever use."

"There must be other women in the galaxy that Dave can console himself with," Clive said. "That gold would certainly help him find her."

"I was just about to suggest the same thing, pertaining to you," I said. "But as far as I'm concerned, Rosemary is my choice. She doesn't care whether I'm wealthy or not."

"There must be a solution to this problem," Clive said.

"There is," said Rosemary.

Clive rose to his feet and I did too. Rosemary didn't seem to expect this and she was late getting up.

"In politics," said Clive, "it is known as the coup d'etat."

He swung and I swung. Then we both swung while Rosemary screamed. Suddenly everything got black.

When I woke up, I thought I had underestimated Clive, but I saw him sleeping peacefully and I also observed he had a lump on his head, like I had. Rosemary was sitting on a chunk of marble watching us, holding a small stout

club in her hand.

"As soon as you feel strong enough," she said, "you can start loading gold onto my space ship. It's over in the next valley. We're all going back to civilization. The wars there are more impersonal."

"You've made your choice?" I asked.

"I have," she said, "but to avoid bloodshed, I'll not reveal it till we get home—unless one of you figures it out."

"What happens then?"

"The loser gets locked up or placed under guard. I don't think, if you're the loser you'd do anything silly, like cracking up the space ship. After all, there'll be a fortune in gold and consolation with another girl. I'm sure there is another girl in the universe."

At the time, though I didn't think there was.

When we landed on Earth, we divided the spoils three ways because Rosemary decided not to take either of us.

"Neither of you asked me to choose between you," she said, "and that was the way to decide. You should have said: 'Take one of us and the other will abide by your decision.' That is what is known as compromise, even if it doesn't seem that way. The trouble with men is that few of them can lose gracefully. They've got to start a war rather than a compromise."

"But losing isn't compromising," I pointed out. "If you give up something and gain something, that's a compromise."

"How do you know you haven't gained by losing me," she said.

I often wonder which of us she preferred back on Problem Planet. But considering the fact that we were probably the first men she got to know after her father died, I think she made a wise choice. Clive married a woman lawyer, and I married a chorus girl.

Rosemary? She married a wrestler that could throw her.

THE END

INTRODUCING the AUTHOR



Frank M. Robinson



(Continued From Page 2)

politicians who talk about any kind of existence other than "peaceful co-existence"—in other

words, war—are dangerous men and scientifically illiterate. Pet prejudice: supposedly intelligent

men who believe the clap-trap in books like "Worlds in Collision".

My own tastes in science fiction are catholic, ranging from a good, taut "chase" story to the intricately woven "idea" tale. As a writer, I admire Heinlein's ability to tell a story, Tucker's flair for characterization, Kornbluth's knack for satire, Bob Bloch's humor, and Richard Matheson's sheer ability at writing.

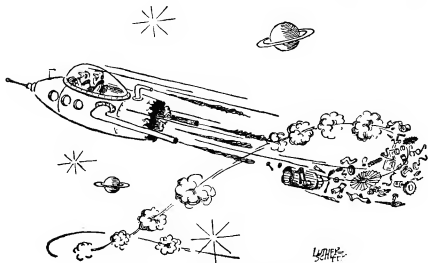
Science fiction is about the last remaining outpost of the vanishing pulp magazines and if this page seems tear-streaked, there's good reason. They served as a training ground for many excellent modern writers and they were good, clean

entertainment. Hackneyed phrase though it is, it's far more than can be said for most of the pocket-books, comics, and dime-sized magazines flooding the newsstands.

I like the field of science fiction for many reasons. It's one of the few really live and original entertainment fields left. It's probably the only field where you can discuss social and political and scientific trends and make them vastly exciting.

And besides, in what other field do editors have wives like Frances Hamling, who is not only charming and brainy but can cook like nobody's business?

—Frank M. Robinson



"Now let's really open her up!"

Being telepaths, Teeps were looked upon as supermen; yet they feared someone, identity unknown—except for his unusual occupation as—

The Hood Maker

by

Philip K. Dick

“A hood!”
“Somebody with a hood!”

Workers and shoppers hurried down the sidewalk, joining the forming crowd. A sallow-faced youth dropping his bike and raced over. The crowd grew, businessmen in gray coats, tired-faced secretaries, clerks and workmen.

“Get him!” The crowd swarmed forward. “The old man!”

The sallow-faced youth scooped up a rock from the gutter and hurled it. The rock missed the old man, crashing against a store front.

“He’s got a hood, all right!”

“Take it away!”

More rocks fell. The old man gasped in fear, trying to push past two soldiers blocking his way. A rock struck him on the back.

“What you got to hide?” The sallow-faced youth ran up in front of him. “Why you afraid of a probe?”

“He’s got something to hide!”

A worker grabbed the old man’s hat. Eager hands groped for the thin metal band around his head.

“Nobody’s got a right to hide!”

The old man fell, sprawling to his hands and knees, umbrella rolling. A clerk caught hold of the hood and tugged. The crowd surged, struggling to get the metal band. Suddenly the youth gave a cry. He backed off, the hood held up. “I got it! I got it.” He ran to his bike and pedalled off rapidly gripping the bent hood.

A robot police car pulled up to the curb, siren screaming. Robot cops leaped out, clearing the mob away.

“You hurt?” They helped the old man up.

The old man shook his head, dazed. His glasses hung from one ear. Blood and saliva streaked his face.

“All right.” The cop’s metal

fingers released. "Better get off the street. Inside someplace. For your own good."

* * *

Clearance Director Ross pushed the memo plate away. "Another one. I'll be glad when the Anti-Immunity Bill is passed."

Peters glanced up. "Another?"

"Another person wearing a hood — a probe shield. That makes ten in the last forty-eight hours. They're mailing more out all the time."

"Mailed, slipped under doors, in pockets, left at desks — countless ways of distribution."

"If more of them notified us—"

Peters grinned crookedly. "It's a wonder any of them do. There's a reason why hoods are sent to these people. They're not picked out at random."

"Why are they picked?"

"They have something to hide. Why else would hoods be sent to them?"

"What about those who *do* notify us?"

"They're afraid to wear them. They pass the hoods on to us — to avoid suspicion."

Ross reflected moodily. "I suppose so."

"An innocent man has no reason to conceal his thoughts. Ninety-nine per cent of the population is glad to have its mind scanned. Most people *want* to prove their loyalty. But this one per cent is



guilty of something."

Ross opened a manila folder and took out a bent metal band. He studied it intently. "Look at it. Just a strip of some alloy. But it effectively cuts off all probes. The teeps go crazy. It buzzes them when they try to get past. Like a shock."

"You've sent samples to the lab, of course."

"No. I don't want any of the lab workers turning out their own hoods. We have trouble enough!"

"Who was this taken from?"

Ross stabbed a button on his desk. "We'll find out. I'll have the teep make a report."

THE door melted and a lank sal-low-faced youth came into the room. He saw the metal band in Ross' hand and smiled, a thin, alert smile. "You wanted me?"

Ross studied the youth. Blonde hair, blue eyes. An ordinary looking kid, maybe a college sophomore. But Ross knew better. Ernest Abbud was a telepathic mutant — a teep. One of several hundred employed by Clearance for its loyalty probes.

Before, the teeps, loyalty probes had been haphazard. Oaths, examinations, wire-tappings, were not enough. The theory that each person had to prove his loyalty was fine — as a theory. In practice few people could do it. It looked as if the concept of guilty until proved

innocent might have to be abandoned and the Roman law restored.

The problem, apparently insoluble, had found its answer in the Madagascar Blast of 2004. Waves of hard radiation had lapped over several thousand troops stationed in the area. Of those who lived, few produced subsequent progeny. But of the several hundred children born to the survivors of the blast, many showed neural characteristics of a radically new kind. A human mutant had come into being — for the first time in thousands of years.

The teeps appeared by accident. But they solved the most pressing problem the Free Union faced: the detection and punishment of disloyalty. The teeps were invaluable to the Government of the Free Union — and the teeps knew it.

"You got this?" Ross asked, tapping the hood.

Abbud nodded. "Yes."

The youth was following his thoughts, not his spoken words. Ross flushed angrily. "What was the man like?" he demanded harshly. "The memo plate gives no details."

"Doctor Franklin is his name. Director of the Federal Resources Commission. Sixty-seven years of age. Here on a visit to a relative."

"Walter Franklin! I've heard of him." Ross stared up at Abbud. "Then you already—"

"As soon as I removed the hood

I was able to scan him."

"Where did Franklin go after the assault?"

"Indoors. Instructed by the police."

"They arrived?"

"After the hood had been taken, of course. It went perfectly. Franklin was spotted by another telepath, not myself. I was informed Franklin was coming my way. When he reached me I shouted that he was wearing a hood. A crowd collected and others took up the shout. The other telepath arrived and we manipulated the crowd until we were near him. I took the hood myself — and you know the rest."

Ross was silent for a moment. "Do you know how he got the hood? Did you scan that?"

"He received it by mail."

"Does he—"

"He has no idea who sent it or where it came from."

Ross frowned. "Then he can't give us any information about them. The senders."

"The Hood Maker," Abbud said icily.

ROSS glanced quickly up. "What?"

"The Hood Maker. *Somebody* makes them." Abbud's face was hard. "*Somebody* is making probe screens to keep us out."

"And you're sure—"

"Franklin knows nothing! He ar-

rived in the city last night. This morning his mail machine brought the hood. For a time he deliberated. Then he purchased a hat and put it on over the hood. He set out on foot toward his niece's house. We spotted him several minutes later, when he entered range."

"There seems to be more of them, these days. More hoods being sent out. But you know that." Ross set his jaw. "We've got to locate the senders."

"It'll take time. They apparently wear hoods constantly." Abbud's face twisted. "We have to get so damn close! Our scanning range is extremely limited. But sooner or later we'll locate one of them. Sooner or later we'll tear a hood off somebody — and find *him*. . ."

"In the last year five thousand hood-wearers have been detected Ross stated. "Five thousand — and not one of them knows anything. Where the hoods come from or who makes them."

"When there are more of us, we'll have a better chance," Abbud said grimly. "Right now there are too few of us. But eventually—"

"You're going to have Franklin probed, aren't you?" Peters said to Ross. "As a matter of course."

"I suppose so." Ross nodded to Abbud. You might as well go ahead on him. Have one of your group run the regular total probe and see if there's anything of interest bur-

ied down in his non-conscious neural area. Report the results to me in the usual way."

Abbud reached into his coat. He brought out a tape spool and tossed it down on the desk in front of Ross. "Here you are."

"What's this?"

"The total probe on Franklin. All levels — completely searched and recorded."

Ross stared up at the youth. "You—"

"We went ahead with it." Abbud moved toward the door. "It's a good job. Cummings did it. We found considerable disloyalty. Mostly ideological rather than overt. You'll probably want to pick him up. When he was twenty-four he found some old books and musical records. He was strongly influenced. The latter part of the tape discusses fully our evaluation of his deviation."

The door melted and Abbud left.

Ross and Peters stared after him. Finally Ross took the tape spool and put it with the bent metal hood.

"I'll damned," Peters said. "They went ahead with the probe."

Ross nodded, deep in thought. "Yeah. And I'm not sure I like it."

The two men glanced at each other — and knew, as they did so, that outside the office Ernest Abbud was scanning their thoughts.

"Damn it!" Ross said futilely.

"Damn it!"

WALTER Franklin breathed rapidly, peering around him. He wiped nervous sweat from his lined face with a trembling hand.

Down the corridor the echoing clang of Clearance agents sounded, growing louder.

He had got away from the mob — spared for a while. That was four hour ago. Now the sun had set and evening was settling over greater New York. He had managed to make his way half way across the city, almost to the outskirts — and now a public alarm was out for his arrest.

Why? He had worked for the Free Union Government all his life. He had done nothing disloyal. Nothing, except open the morning mail, find the hood, deliberate about it, and finally put it on. He remembered the small instruction tag:

GREETINGS!

This probe screen is sent to you with compliments of the maker and the earnest hope that it will be of some value to you. Thank you.

Nothing else. No other information. For a long time he had pondered. Should he wear it? He had never done anything. He had nothing to hide — nothing disloyal to the Union. But the thought fascinated him. If he wore the hood his

mind would be his own. Nobody could look into it. His mind would belong to him again, private, secret, to think as he wished, endless thoughts for no one else's consumption but his own.

Finally he had made up his mind and put on the hood, fitting his old Homburg over it. He had gone outside — and within ten minutes a mob was screaming and yelling around him. And now a general alarm was out for his arrest.

Franklin wracked his brains desperately. What could he do? They would bring him up before a Clearance Board. No accusation would be brought: it would be up to him to clear himself, to prove he was loyal. *Had* he ever done anything wrong? Was there something he had done he was forgetting? He had put on the hood. Maybe that was it. There was some sort of an Anti-Immunity bill up in Congress to make wearing of a probe screen a felony, but it hadn't been passed yet—

The Clearance agents were near, almost on him. He retreated down the corridor of the hotel, glancing desperately around him. A red sign glowed: EXIT. He hurried toward it and down a flight of basement stairs, out onto a dark street. It was bad to be outside, where the mobs were. He had tried to remain indoors as much as possible. But now there was no choice.

Behind him a voice shrilled loudly. Something cut past him, smoking away a section of the pavement. A Slem-ray. Franklin ran, gasping for breath, around a corner and down a side street. People glanced at him curiously as he rushed past.

He crossed a busy street and moved with a surging group of theater goers. Had the agents seen him? He peered nervously around. None in sight.

At the corner he crossed with the lights. He reached the safety zone in the center, watching a sleek Clearance car cruising toward him. Had it seen him go out to the safety zone? He left the zone, heading toward the curb on the far side. The Clearance car shot suddenly forward, gaining speed. Another appeared, coming the other way.

FRANKLIN reached the curb. The first car ground to a halt. Clearance agents piled out, swarming up onto the sidewalk.

He was trapped. There was no place to hide. Around him tired shoppers and office workers gazed curiously, their faces devoid of sympathy. A few grinned at him in vacant amusement. Franklin peered frantically around. No place, no door, no person—

A car pulled up in front of him, its doors sliding open. "Get in." A

young girl leaned toward him, her pretty face urgent. "Get in, damn it!"

He got in. The girl slammed the doors and the car picked up speed. A Clearance car swung in ahead of them, its sleek bulk blocking the street. A second Clearance car moved in behind them.

The girl leaned forward, gripping the controls. Abruptly the car lifted. It left the street, clearing the cars ahead, gaining altitude rapidly. A flash of violet lit up the sky behind them.

"Get down!" the girl snapped. Franklin sank down in his seat. The car moved in a wide arc, passing beyond the protective columns of a row of buildings. On the ground, the Clearance cars gave up and turned back.

Franklin settled back, mopping his forehead shakily. "Thanks," he muttered.

"Don't mention it." The girl increased the car's speed. They were leaving the business section of the city, moving above the residential outskirts. She steered silently, intent on the sky ahead.

"Who are you?" Franklin asked.

The girl tossed something back to him. "Put that on."

A hood. Franklin unfastened it and slipped it awkwardly over his head. "It's in place."

"Otherwise they'll get us with a teep scan. We have to be careful all

the time."

"Where are we going?"

The girl turned toward him, studying him with calm gray eyes, one hand resting on the wheel. "We're going to the Hood Maker," she said. "The public alarm for you is top priority. If I let you off you won't last an hour."

"But I don't understand." Franklin shook his head, dazed. "Why do they want me? What have I done?"

"You're being framed." The girl brought the car around in a wide arc, wind whistling shrilly through its struts and fenders. "Framed by the teeps. Things are happening fast. There's no time to lose."

THE little bald-headed man removed his glasses and held out his hand to Franklin, peering nearsightedly. "I'm glad to meet you, Doctor. I've followed your work at the Board with great interest."

"Who are you?" Franklin demanded.

The little man grinned self-consciously. "I'm James Cutter. The Hood Maker, as the teeps call me. This is our factory." He waved around the room. "Take a look at it."

Franklin gazed around him. He was in a warehouse, an ancient wooden building of the last century. Giant worm-scored beams rose up, dry and cracking. The floor was

concrete. Old-fashioned fluorescent lights glinted and flickered from the roof. The walls were streaked with water stains and bulging pipes.

Franklin moved across the room, Cutter beside him. He was bewildered. Everything had happened fast. He seemed to be outside New York, in some dilapidated industrial suburb. Men were working on all sides of him, bent over stampers and moulds. The air was hot. An archaic fan whirled. The warehouse echoed and vibrated with a constant din.

"This—" Franklin murmured. "This is—"

"This is where we make the hoods. Not very impressive, is it? Later on we hope to move to new quarters. Come along and I'll show you the rest."

Cutter pushed a side door open and they entered a small laboratory, bottles and retorts everywhere in cluttered confusion. "We do our research in here. Pure and applied. We've learned a few things. Some we may use, some we hope won't be needed. And it keeps our refugees busy."

"Refugees?"

Cutter pushed some equipment back and seated himself on a lab table. "Most of the others are here for the same reason as you. Framed by the teeps. Accused of deviation. But we got to them first."

"But why—"

"Why were you framed? Because of your position. Director of a Government Department. All these men were prominent — and all were framed by teep probes." Cutter lit a cigarette, leaning back against the water-stained wall. "We exist because of a discovery made ten years ago in a Government lab." He tapped his hood. "This alloy — opaque to probes. Discovered by accident, by one of these men. Teeps came after him instantly, but he escaped. He made a number of hoods and passed them to other workers in his field. That's how we got started."

"How many are here?"

Cutter laughed. "Can't tell you that. Enough to turn out hoods and keep them circulating. To people prominent in Government. People holding positions of authority. Scientists, officials, educators—"

"Why?"

"Because we want to get to them first, before the teeps. We got to you too late. A total probe report had *already* been made out on you, before the hood was even in the mail.

"The teeps are gradually getting a stranglehold over the Government. They're picking off the best men, denouncing them and getting them arrested. If a teep says a man is disloyal Clearance has to haul him in. We tried to get a hood to you in time. The report couldn't be

passed on to Clearance if you were wearing a hood. But they outsmarted us. They got a mob after you and snatched the hood. As soon as it was off they served the report to Clearance."

"So that's why they wanted it off."

"The teeps can't file a framed report on a man whose mind is opaque to probes. Clearance isn't that stupid. The teeps have to get the hoods off. Every man wearing a hood is a man out of bounds. They've managed so far by stirring up mobs — but that's ineffectual. Now they're working on this bill in Congress. Senator Waldo's Anti-Immunity Bill. It would outlaw wearing hoods." Cutter grinned ironically. "If a man is innocent why shouldn't he want his mind probed? The bill makes wearing a probe shield a felony. People who receive hoods will turn them over to Clearance. There won't be a man in ten thousand who'll keep his hood, if it means prison and confiscation of property."

"I met Waldo, once. I can't believe he understands what his bill would do. If he could be made to see—"

"Exactly! If he could be made to see. This bill has to be stopped. If it goes through we're licked. And the teeps are in. Somebody has to talk to Waldo and make him see the situation." Cutter's eyes were

bright. "You know the man. He'll remember you."

"What do you mean?"

"Franklin, we're sending you back again — to meet Waldo. It's our only chance to stop the bill. And it has to be stopped."

THE cruiser roared over the Rockies, brush and tangled forest flashing by below. "There's a level pasture over to the right," Cutter said. "I'll set her down, if I can find it."

He snapped off the jets. The roar died into silence. They were coasting above the hills.

"To the right," Franklin said.

Cutter brought the cruiser down in a sweeping glide. "This will put us within walking distance of Waldo's estate. We'll go the rest of the way on foot." A shuddering growl shook them as the landing fins dug into the ground — and they were at rest.

Around them tall trees moved faintly with the wind. It was mid-morning. The air was cool and thin. They were high up, still in the mountains, on the Colorado side.

"What are the chances of our reaching him?" Franklin asked.

"Not very good."

Franklin started. "What? Why not?"

Cutter pushed the cruiser door back and leaped out onto the ground. "Come on." He helped

Franklin out and slammed the door after him. "Waldo is guarded. He's got a wall of robots around him. That's why we've never tried before. If it weren't crucial we wouldn't be trying now."

They left the pasture, making their way down the hill along a narrow weed-covered path. "What are they doing it for?" Franklin asked. "The teeps. Why do they want to get power?"

"Human nature, I suppose."

"*Human* nature?"

"The teeps are no different from the Jacobins, the Roundheads, the Nazis, the Bolsheviks. There's always some group that wants to lead mankind — for its own good, of course."

"Do the teeps believe that?"

"Most teeps believe they're the natural leaders of mankind. Non-telepathic humans are an inferior species. Teeps are the next step up, *homo superior*. And because they're superior, it's natural they should lead. Make all the decisions for us."

"And you don't agree," Franklin said.

"The teeps are different from us — but that doesn't mean they're superior. A telepathic faculty doesn't imply general superiority. The teeps aren't a superior race. They're human beings with a special ability. But that doesn't give them a right to tell us what to do. It's not a new problem."

"Who should lead mankind, then?" Franklin asked. "Who should be the leaders?"

"*Nobody* should lead mankind. It should lead itself." Cutter leaned forward suddenly, body tense.

"We're almost there. Waldo's estate is directly ahead. Get ready. Everything depends on the next few minutes."

"A few robot guards." Cutter lowered his binoculars. "But that's not what's worrying me. If Waldo has a teep nearby, he'll detect our hoods."

"And we can't take them off."

"No. The whole thing would be out, passed from teep to teep." Cutter moved cautiously forward. "The robots will stop us and demand identification. We'll have to count on your Director's clip."

They left the bushes, crossing the open field toward the buildings that made up Senator Waldo's estate. They came onto a dirt road and followed it, neither of them speaking, watching the landscape ahead.

"Halt!" A robot guard appeared, streaking toward them across the field. "Identify yourselves!"

Franklin showed his clip. "I'm Director level. We're here to see the Senator. I'm an old friend."

Automatic relays clicked as the robot studied the identification clip. "From the Director level?"

"That's right," Franklin said, Slem-gun and fired, becoming uneasy.

"Get out of the way," Cutter said impatiently. "We don't have any time to waste."

The robot withdrew uncertainly. "Sorry to have stopped you, sir. The Senator is inside the main building. Directly ahead."

"All right." Cutter and Franklin advanced past the robot. Sweat stood out on Cutter's round face. "We made it, he murmured. "Now let's hope there aren't any teeps inside."

Franklin reached the porch. He stepped slowly up, Cutter behind him. At the door he halted, glancing at the smaller man. "Shall I—"

"Go ahead." Cutter was tense. "Let's get right inside. It's safer."

Franklin raised his hand. The door clicked sharply as its lens photographed him and checked his image. Franklin prayed silently. If the Clearance alarm had been sent out this far—

The door melted.

"Inside," Cutter said quickly.

Franklin entered, looking around in the semi-darkness. He blinked, adjusting to the dim light of the hall. Somebody was coming toward him. A shape, a small shape, coming rapidly, lithely. Was it Waldo?

A lank, sallow-faced youth entered the hall, a fixed smile on his face. "Good morning, Doctor Franklin," he said. He raised his

CUTTER and Ernest Abbud stared down at the oozing mass that had been Doctor Franklin. Neither of them spoke. Finally Cutter raised his head, his face drained of color.

"Was that necessary?"

Abbud shifted, suddenly conscious of him. "Why not? He shrugged, the Slem-gun pointed at Cutter's stomach. "He was an old man. He wouldn't have lasted long in the protective-custody camp."

Cutter took out his package of cigarettes and lit up slowly, his eyes on the youth's face. He had never seen Ernest Abbud before. But he knew who he was. He watched the sallow-faced youth kick idly at the remains on the floor.

"Then Waldo is a teep," Cutter said.

"Yes."

"Franklin was wrong. He *does* have full understanding of his bill."

"Of course! The Anti-Immunity Bill is an integral part of our activity." Abbud waved the snout of the Slem-gun. "Remove your hood. I can't scan you— and it makes me uneasy."

Cutter hesitated. He dropped his cigarette thoughtfully to the floor and crushed it underfoot. "What are you doing here? You usually

hang out in New York. This is a long way out here."

Abbud smiled. "We picked up Doctor Franklin's thoughts as he entered the girl's car—before she gave him the hood. She waited too long. We got a distinct visual image of her, seen from the back seat, of course. But she turned around to give him the hood. Two hours ago Clearance picked her up. She knew a great deal — our first real contact. We were able to locate the factory and round up most of the workers."

"Oh?" Cutter murmured.

"They're in protective custody. Their hoods are gone — and the supply stored for distribution. The stampers have been dismantled. As far as I know we have all the group. You're the last one."

"Then does it matter if I keep my hood?"

Abbud's eyes flickered. "Take it off. I want to scan you — Mister Hood Maker."

Cutter grunted. "What do you mean?"

"Several of your men gave us images of you — and details of your trip here. I came out personally, notifying Waldo through our relay system in advance. I wanted to be here myself."

"Why?"

"It's an occasion. A great occasion for us."

"What position do *you* hold?"

Cutter demanded.

Abbud's sallow face turned ugly. "Come on! Off with the hood! I could blast you now. But I want to scan you first."

"All right. I'll take it off. You can scan me, if you want. Probe all the way down." Cutter paused, reflecting soberly. "It's your funeral."

"What do you mean?"

Cutter removed his hood, tossing it onto a table by the door. "Well? What do you see? What do I know — *that none of the others knew?*"

FOR a moment Abbud was silent. Suddenly his face twitched, his mouth working. The Slem-gun swayed. Abbud staggered, a violent shudder leaping through his lank frame. He gaped at Cutter in rising horror.

"I learned it only recently," Cutter said. "In our lab. I didn't want to use it — but you forced me to take off my hood. I always considered the alloy my most important discovery — until this. In some ways, this is even more important. Don't you agree?"

Abbud said nothing. His face was a sickly gray. His lips moved but no sound came.

"I had a hunch—and I played it for all it was worth. I knew you telepaths were born from a single group, resulting from an accident — the Madagascar hydrogen explosion. That made me think. Most

mutants, that we know of, are thrown off universally by the species that's reached the mutation stage. Not by a single group in one area. The whole world, wherever the species exists.

"Damage to the germ plasm of a specific group of humans is the cause of your existence. You weren't a mutant in the sense that you represented a natural development of the evolutionary process. In no sense could it be said that homo sapiens had reached the mutation stage. So perhaps you weren't a true mutant.

"I began to make studies, some biological, some merely statistical. Sociological research. We began correlating facts on you, on each member of your group we could locate. How old you were. What you were doing for a living. How many were married. Number of children. After awhile I came across the facts you're scanning right now."

Cutter leaned toward Abbud, watching the youth intently.

"You're not a true mutation, Abbud. Your group exists because of a chance explosion. You're different from us because of damage to the reproductive apparatus of your parents. You lack one specific characteristic that true mutants possess." A faint smile twitched across Cutter's features. "A lot of you are married. But not one birth has been reported. Not one birth! Not a

single teep child! You can't reproduce, Abbud. You're *sterile*, the whole lot of you. When you die there won't be any more.

"You're not mutants. You're freaks!"

Abbud grunted hoarsely, his body trembling. "I see this, in your mind." He pulled himself together with an effort. "And you've kept this secret, have you? You're the only one who knows?"

"Somebody else knows," Cutter said.

"Who?"

"*You* know. You scanned me. And since you're a teep, all the others—"

Abbud fired, the Slem-gun digging frantically into his own middle. He dissolved showering in a rain of fragments. Cutter moved back, his hands over his face. He closed his eyes, holding his breath.

When he looked again there was nothing.

Cutter shook his head. "Too late, Abbud. Not fast enough. Scanning is instant — and Waldo is within range. The relay system . . . And even if they missed *you*, they can't avoid picking me up."

A sound. Cutter turned. Clearance agents were moving rapidly into the hall, glancing down at the remains on the floor and up at Cutter.

Director Ross covered Cutter uncertainly, confused and shaken.

"What happened? Where—"

"Scan him!" Peters snapped. "Get a teep in here quick. Bring Waldo in. Find out what happened."

Cutter grinned ironically. "Sure," he said, nodding shakily. He sagged with relief. "Scan me. I have nothing to hide. Get a teep in here for a probe — if you can find any . . ."



"Thanks!"

— Important News About Next Month —

Journalism — The Fourth Estate — is an integral part of our way of life, but unlike science, has not been "villainized" in stories extrapolating the future. Yet, who has the greater impact on our daily lives — a scientist or journalist? Milton Lesser maintains it's the latter, and writes a gripping novel of dire forces at work — newspapers creating news to fit their headlines! Don't miss **NEWSHOUND** in the July issue . . .

THE MARTIAN

by

Bob Silverberg

Someday an Earthman will land on Mars, a hero and proof of man's climb to supremacy. If he finds intelligent life there he'll extend a greeting; if it is refused, how will man react?

DICK Lewicki waited for some reaction from the Martian. An hour passed, and it seemed like years, but still the sack-like thing made no move. Dick advanced closer, until he was in reach of the Martian. It still sat there, unmoving except for the occasional intake of a breath.

Dammit, he thought, was this what we built the ship for, so I could come out here and stare at this lump that doesn't even move?

He moved up to the Martian as close as he dared, and then stopped. He stared at it, puzzled. There was no instruction manual covering such a situation as this. He was on his own.

He watched it, but was unable to return glares for long with the three cold eyes which looked back at him. After what seemed like

hours of staring, he took several photographs of the thing, and looked at it some more. He noted the soft regular, infrequent sighs of breath; the orange, granular looking skin. And he looked at the impassive eyes once more, and the slit-like mouth.

* * *

The first thing Lewicki thought of after he found the Martian was the old man. Manning, his name was; something-or-other Manning, a professor at Columbia or maybe N.Y.U. Manning had come up to him one night during that weary stay in Manhattan.

"You're the space-pilot?" Manning had said abruptly. His voice was cracked and dry, and he was old, very old. His white hair was clipped close to the skull, and his face was a mass of wrinkles and



seams, out of which two burning eyes stood like beacons.

"That's right, sir," Lewicki said. The other introduced himself: Professor of Philosophy. Probably a harmless old coot buried in the middle ages, Dick decided.

"How old are you, spaceman?"

Dick looked at the old man. In that ancient face, the eyes were still young; they flamed.

"I'm twenty-three, sir."

"Twenty-three's a good age, young man. Too bad you can't stay twenty-three forever. You can't you know. You grow older."

Lewicki said nothing.

"You're going to Mars, aren't

you? First man to ride a rocket to another world. Big honor for you, isn't it?"

"Yes, sir. A very big honor."

"Think you'll find any life on Mars?" the old man asked, maintaining a level gaze. His eyes burnt like stars in the black night.

"I don't know, sir. The scientists say—"

"You'll find some big green monsters, maybe?"

"I don't know, sir," Lewicki said. "I don't know."

"*I hope you don't!*" The old man's voice suddenly became a whiplash. "I hope you find Mars as dead as the Moon. Do you

know why, young man?"

"No, sir." Dick wondered if he should ask the old man to leave before something serious happened.

"Because you'll kill whatever you find, spaceman. You'll butcher and destroy what you find. Man will always do that. Man will destroy what he doesn't understand, spaceman. If he doesn't know what to do, he'll shoot away and hope for the best."

The old man was getting quite excited, Dick saw. He stood up and stretched, hoping the other would grasp the hint.

"But we're not a military mission, sir. I'm just going to investigate, to—"

"When I was your age," the old man interrupted, as Dick started to edge him to the door, "I had the same ideas. Men of science didn't kill; they just studied. But no; all men are the same, if you go deep enough." Dick opened the door.

The old man paused and then went on in his brittle voice. "That's why I don't want you to find life on Mars," the old man said. "You won't be able to understand it, and what you can't understand you'll destroy. I know it."

"I think you're wrong, sir," Dick said, gently pressing his visitor out into the hall.

"Remember that," the old man said as the door started to close. "Man destroys what he doesn't understand!"

M*AN destroys what he doesn't understand.* Dick paced around the twisted Martian boulder on which the sack was propped, and looked at it. He squatted in the sand, staring at his boots, scratching the back of his neck, and wondering.

"Why?" he wondered. *What does it think? Does it think at all? Is it alive?*

Why?

It still sat there, unmoving except for the occasional intake of a breath. Gingerly, Lewicki extended his hand and poked the thing's hide. It yielded just the slightest, and he drew his hand back quickly.

He watched the sack sitting quietly in the desert: how long had it been there? What was it thinking of? How could he communicate with it? Why wasn't he home, safe on Earth?

He looked inquiringly at the Martian, but the Martian made no reply.

* * *

He had spent a short vacation on a fishing trip, back on a planet green with grass and overflowing with lakes and rivers, and was

busy unpacking his gear that day in 1947 when the visiphone announced a caller.

The fishing trip was supposed to be the best thing for work-weary engineers. Hanson, who worked at the next desk, had told him that, and Hanson had been right. But before he could call Hanson to thank him for the good advice, the U. N. man came into his room.

His name was Kennerson, and he was forty-ish, dressed in a trim green-and-red business suit, and looked faintly bored with the whole thing. He had been sent to find a space-pilot.

The U. N. had been looking for a pilot ever since that day in the spring of 1974 when the scientists had declared Man at last ready to go to the planets. Lewicki had thought of volunteering, since he had led his class in astrogation at Cal Tech in 1973, and had as much knowledge of the job as anyone. But he hadn't volunteered.

And now they had come to him, and asked him to pilot the first ship to Mars, and Lewicki, even though he knew it meant giving up his home, his parents, his job, his girl, possibly his life, accepted. He was a fool, everyone said. But he wanted a chance at the stars.

Then there started a bombardment of photographers and report-

ers and hundreds of other busy-bodies until Lewicki left and headed for the U. N. headquarters in New York. There he was put through test after test, until he began to fear he wasn't going to make the trip to Mars after all.

But he stayed and stubbornly passed the physical, and stayed after every part of him had been pushed, pulled, twisted, and tapped, after he had been X-rayed, fluoroscoped, and given an isotope-tracer test. He passed.

DICK watched the slit of a mouth, and the three lidless eyes, covered with sturdy nictitating membranes protecting them from the sand.

"I greet you as a representative of the United Nations of Earth," he said to the sack. There was no reply. Dick looked away to his right, unable to watch the cold flaccidity before him.

He saw the few scrawny things which could be recognized as plants, sad, bedraggled, thirsty Martian plants. Not much else was there, but desert, and rocks, and the sack.

He wandered over to one of the plants and looked at it, keeping an eye on the quiescent Martian. He picked up one or two of the scrawny leaves: they were thin, flat, broad, heavily veined, almost pathetic. And then he looked up at

the sky for a moment, hoping to find an answer. It was a dull, grey, dingy sky, with the sun large and fuzzy in one corner. He felt terribly alone, and the voice of the old man was large inside his head.

* * *

After the physical came the psych tests, and the psychologists gave Lewicki a thorough treatment. - The way to the stars was rough, he was finding out. After an hour and a half he cracked and almost began crying, and felt again that he had washed out. But a kindly man with a beard and a goat's face told him that his reaction was perfectly normal.

He felt a dull chill in the pit of his stomach when he realized he had passed the second barrier, and hardly anything stood between him and space.

Then came lonely nights. Lewicki would walk at night through crowded Manhattan and wince whenever he looked up at the stars. It wasn't possible to see many stars in New York — the city lights blotted most of them out — but a few peeked through, and Lewicki felt afraid every time he realized that in a short time he might be all alone somewhere up there, while the people who jostled him in the dirty streets remained anchored to Earth.

Weeks passed, weeks while Lewicki lived in a hotel near the U. N. Buildings, watching the Secretariat, the big mirror that shone of its own light. He was hounded by reporters constantly, and spent most of his time reading and writing letters home. He was pretty homesick, and he wondered what his life might have been like had he turned down the offer the day the U. N. man had called.

HE trotted to the ship and back again, feeling the sands crunching beneath the unaccustomed impact of feet. The sack was still as he left it.

"Damn you, why don't you do something?" he shouted. "Why don't you show you're alive?"

The sack drew in a sigh of breath, but no other sign.

* * *

Finally the word had come through. He was in. Dick Lewicki had been catapulted into the world spotlight. On December 4, 1975, a hot midsummer day in the wastes of western Australia, he kissed his girl goodbye, climbed into his ship, *La Speranza*, and rocketed it out of the world. Lewicki felt alone, terribly alone, amid the noise.

Man's drive to space had not been a speedy one. The frantic optimism of the late forties had led people to think the moon was just around the corner, and the

U.S. army's premature announcement that a space station was under consideration didn't help to ease the belief that man would travel space fairly soon. All through the 1950's and 1960's it continued, the never-ending wait for that first rocket to take off. And it never seemed to come.

Finally the United Nations scraped up enough money to finance a revival of intense rocket research, and abruptly in the late 1960's an unmanned rocket achieved a speed of seven miles per second and managed to escape Earth's gravitation. It reached the moon, and the explosion was spectacular enough to be plainly visible on Earth.

Then came the era of the mid-gets, and a handful of courageous three-footers piloted the first manned ships to the moon. Some of them actually survived the return trip. But that seemed to be the end of Man's conquest of space. No matter how the drive was altered, its lift was limited, and it could never raise Mars. All the proud hopes, the colony on the moon, the trips to other planets, were cancelled out by the inexorable mathematics.

1973 came, and for the umpteenth time conflicting ideologies strained against each other. And in 1974 came war. It lasted only

about three weeks, and then died like a pricked bubble from sheer foolishness. Its only accomplishment was the abrupt atomic destruction of a large American seaport and of a Russian manufacturing city, and the seared plains remain as souvenirs of the final war.

The war movement collapsed as quickly as it had begun, and the leaders of the contending powers looked thoroughly abashed, like small boys found writing on a fence. And somewhere in that same year, 1974, a technician accidentally miswired a circuit while working on a new robomb, and found the path to the planets.

Thus Dick Lewicki flew in his spaceship, and all the world followed his orbit to Mars.

“WHY couldn't you be a monster with ten legs?” Dick said to Martian. “Why do you have to sit there and ignore me, as if I'm some sort of insect? *Why don't you do something?*”

He picked up a small, wind-worn pebble, and tossed it at the Martian. It bounced off the sack's side and rolled for a few feet.

* * *

He hated every minute of the trip to Mars, though never once did he let his feelings creep into the messages he sent back each day to the waiting world. He had

one big advantage over the early pioneers: he revelled in a library of tridims, a luxury which the weight-conscious space pioneers could never have indulged in. But one can watch tridims only so long.

Lewicki would pace up and down, down and up, inside the spaceship. He was almost nearly superfluous, he felt, since the cybernetic brain handled all details of the voyage. He was sort of a monitor, a governor, a control circuit included in the wiring in case of emergency. But the ship had no need of him, and he knew it.

He got to know every rivet intimately. He counted each spanner, the paces from end to end, and everything else in sight. For one two-hour stretch he counted his own breaths. And once, for half a "day," he stood staring outside his view-scope, watching Mars grow larger, wondering what was waiting for him out there. Monsters? Men? He had no way of telling, and the unknown pressed in on him.

There had been a few good moments on the way out. The world had thrilled as he passed Orbiter and described the ugly - beautiful space station. The glinting of the sun on the outer band of the awkward-looking Orbiter had caught his fancy especially. But Orbiter had been the second day of the

voyage, during the days of excitement. He passed the moon and was outward bound, and thought he would go mad from boredom as he moved inexorably toward Mars. But never once did he tell Earth how bored he really was. And lonely.

Excitement on Earth built to a terrible crescendo as he approached Mars, and his message of April 12, 1976, announced that he had passed turnover point and was preparing for landing. But he knew that he wasn't really doing a thing. The ship was preparing itself for a landing.

The cybernetic control that had guided the whole journey brought him down lightly and easily in a desert nearly as bleak as the one from which he had set out. This one was reddish, though, and not the dusty brown of the Great Sandy Desert in Australia. He climbed out of the ship slowly — it was good to stretch his legs again; not even the small gym on board had met the demands for exercise imposed by his athletic body.

Feeling exultation mixed with anticlimax, he collected samples of the sand, as his instructions directed him. He filled a few vials with the crumbly dry sand, and carried them back to the ship neatly labelled.

It took him three days of dili-

gent searching before he found the Martian.

* * *

THE landscape stretched away in all directions, red and sandy, flat and dry. For as far as he could see the Martian landscape was a vast peneplain, worn nearly to base level with little nubbins of rocks projecting out here and there. He looked around wildly, and cautiously approached the sack again.

He thought of the bee-hive of Earth, with its teeming billions, and then of silent Mars with its quiet inhabitant waiting patiently.

You won't be able to understand it, a brittle voice said from nowhere. *All men are the same, if you go deep enough.*

"No! No! It's wrong!" Dick felt hot tears at the corners of his eyes, but there was no way of erasing the doubt that was growing in his mind.

"What are you?" he shouted at the unlistening Martian. "Why don't you wake up?"

The Martian didn't reply.

Dick fired two shots directly overhead, and only the two loud reports crashing into his numb ears made him aware of the eternal silence he had broken. The shots had no effect; the Martian still sat complacently, without moving so much as an eyeball.

Dick stared for a minute, then poised the gun in his hand for an awful couple of seconds. He began to sweat inside his spacesuit, and he reached up and automatically swabbed his brow. He held the gun for a moment, then lowered it, then desperately raised it again. He tottered back and forth for just a second and quickly sent a bullet crashing into the Martian's middle eye.

* * *

The sudden blast of the bullet broke all the tension that had accumulated, shattering the tenseness as a soap-bubble. Dick watched detachedly as the shattered eye began to close over with a film, and almost immediately reappeared intact, undamaged. The desert was silent.

He dropped uncertainly to his knees and hesitantly picked up a handful of red sand, letting it dribble through the fingers of his space-gloves and back down to the ground. Finally, the Martian's slit-like mouth furrowed and opened. Dick heard the words, though he never knew whether or not they came from the mouth of the Martian. They would ring in his head forever.

"Go home, little man," the voice said. *"Come back some day—but not soon."*

THE END



Conducted by Mari Wolf

THERE have been, over the years, many accounts of science fiction fandom and science fiction personalities, but none so complete as Sam Moskowitz's *The Immortal Storm*. If you've associated with fan circles you've certainly heard about it: it has run serially for nine years in the *Fantasy Commentator* and has been published complete in a limited mimeographed edition. Now it's out in a printed edition, published by the Atlanta Science Fiction Organization press.

The Immortal Storm covers the fan world from its start in the early 1920's up to late 1939. For one whose acquaintance with fandom doesn't go back that far it's an eye opener. You'll find the accounts you might expect to find: the state of the professional field, the fan clubs and the fanzines published, the story of the first con-

ventions. But to a much greater extent you'll find the story of individual fans and cliques of fans--the great fan feuds.

In describing these feuds, the *Storm* manages to achieve a certain degree of impartiality, which, considering that Sam Moskowitz himself was among the principals in one of the bitterest clashes of all, is most commendable. Still, after reading this history you're not quite convinced that you've seen both sides. I don't know if the picture presented here tells the whole story or not, and it's all a long time past now anyway. It does present a comprehensive picture of all those people actually engaged in fandom in those days, and what the different groups tried to accomplish.

There is a chapter on early British fandom; otherwise the History is given over to describing the

American scene. The account of the earliest days and the earliest fanzines—*Science Fiction Digest*, *Time Traveler*, *The Fantasy Fan*, and others—describes the zines in detail: how they were reproduced, how large they were, who wrote for them, what was their effect on other fans of the time. There is a history of *Fantasy Magazine*, the printed fanzine of the early thirties that many people still consider the greatest fanzine ever published.

It seems strange in retrospect to realize that many of the earliest fanzines were printed or mimeographed; that they were really of almost professional quality, with many professional writers donating work to them (percentage-wise, many more than do so today. Lovecraft's work especially was often given to fanzines.) Then, in the later thirties, in what Sam Moskowitz has termed "third fandom", most of the fanzines were hectographed, the printed zines were gone, and a mimeographed one was set apart by reason of its superior reproduction . . . Yet the early fanzines were those printed at the height of the depression.

Moskowitz brings out the shift in fandom's attitude away from the Hugo Gernsback idea of science fiction being mainly a stepping stone to science hobbies and to science as a career, through the era when fans were concerned mainly with science fiction, to the viewpoint, still current today, that fandom's main interest is in fandom itself.

The *Storm* describes the main stream of American science fiction activity: it is centered in the east,

principally in the New York, New Jersey, Pennsylvania area, though toward the end the Chicago area is mentioned too.

The split in New York fandom, a split that has never healed, is described from its beginnings—or rather, the splits are described from their beginnings. The *Storm* lives up at least in part to its name; science fiction fandom may not be immortal, but it has certainly been tempestuous!

There is the story of the old Science Fiction League, of Hornig and Wollheim; of Sykora and the International Scientific Association; of Moskowitz, Taurasi, Sykora, and New Fandom; of Wollheim, Pohl, Kyle, and the Futurians. The intricacies of the inter and intra-group feuding are told in detail from the time Moskowitz became active in fandom; earlier, the feuds are reported, but without quite the same spirit as those in which the author was himself involved.

The story does not extend as far as the days of the Los Angeles Science Fantasy Association's feudings, but it covers just about all the others.

Of course, there's more in the *Storm* than the recital of all the strife of those early years. There are accounts of many of the fanzines of the thirties—though the very earliest are the ones described in most detail. There is the story of the founding of the Fantasy Amateur Press Association, or FAPA, in 1937. It was founded at a time when US fandom was at a low ebb; fan editors were losing a lot of money on their subscriptions and there weren't many paying sub-

scribers. FAPA was founded as a group to be limited to not more than fifty members, all of whom would publish and write for and circulate science fiction fanzines among themselves in regular mailings, the copies being free to other FAPAns. That this was a successful move is seen in the fact that today, when almost all of the other clubs described in the History have folded FAPA is still going.

There are glimpses of early day fans, including many who were to become well known in the professional science fiction field. Bob Tucker and the notorious "death hoax," Ray Palmer, Robert Lowndes, Earl Korshak. And, near the end of the book, a young fan in the Chicago area just achieving prominence with his fanzine *Stardust* (which you'll still see quoted a lot, even now) William L. Hamling . . .

Also, there are quite a few pictures taken back in the thirties. For those of you who were fans then the pictures would undoubtedly bring back memories; to those of you who weren't, the people seem incredibly changed. Who would ever recognize the Forrest J. Ackerman of 1939? Or Ray Bradbury at Coney Island?

The Immortal Storm is just what its subtitle says it is—a history of science fiction fandom. It's not about science fiction; it's about the people who read science fiction, collected it, wrote to the magazines about it, banded into clubs they called science fiction fanclubs. It's about people who later went on into science fiction professionally, or maybe stayed with it year after year as fans.

It's about the early collections of science fiction, the days when a fan who was active at all managed to obtain every copy of every fanzine. The days when even in the worst feud you wouldn't cut off your enemies' subscription to your fanzine.

Someday I suppose that Sam Moskowitz will come up with the sequel to this one and bring the story of fandom up through the war and post war years to the present. If he goes into as much detail as he has in this history, he's good for at least another big volume.

If you're interested in fans, their publications and their clubs and their feuding, you'll want to read this. Especially if you were a fan back in those early days.

The Immortal Storm sells for \$5.00 and is published by ASFO Press, 713 Coventry Road, Decatur, Ga.

* * *

Now for the fanzines:

PSYCHOTIC: 20c; Dick Geis, 2631 N. Mississippi, Portland 12, Oregon. This guy Geis is real sneaky, sort of a junior grade Machiavelli. Without any advance notice he goes bi-monthly and then, after the protesting letters have been written but before he receives them, goes to a photo offset zine. The perfect bit will be to print the letters (calling Geis an idiot) in the bright new, shiny offset *Psychotic*. This will make all of the letter writers prima facie idiots.

Except for being smaller, the zine is the same, and although smaller it's about the same number of words. (At least I think so, Geis

counted them, not me!)

Being offset improves *Psychotic* tremendously; Geis' layout and the artwork are dazzling. The front cover is a Bob Kellogg type Charles Addams and there's all sorts of interior art.

Along with the usual unusual stuff, this issue has plugs for Harlan Ellison and George Gobel (not necessarily in that order.) Gee, what a double act that would be. You can't hardly find 'em like that. And . . . you can't hardly find 'em like *Psychotic* either. So there you are.

Rating: 1

* * *

CANFAN: 15c; Gerald Steward, 166 McRoberts Ave., Toronto 10, Ontario, Canada. And still editor Steward complains that fans comment only on *Canfan's* excellent reproduction—that they find it the “personality-less fanzine.” Well, reproduction aside (and it is, dear editor, well worth commenting on) I don't see why anyone should find this one lacking in personality.

To be sure, there's no flamboyant pushing of some cause or knocking of some other zine. (You're right; you're not Ellison; you're complaining?) *Canfan's* humor isn't the guffaw type either. But those that find it flat must be pretty young, or pretty uns subtle, or maybe they've been exposed too long to high pressure advertising.

In this issue Daryl Sharp takes a dig or two at Sauceritus in “Flying Saucers Have Taken Off.” W. D. Grant reports on the old movie classics you can get for home movies. Lyell Crane reports on World Tape Pals, a pen pal type organi-

zation whose members correspond via tape recordings. Also John Loomes discusses religion in “No One Can Prove it to You.”

A well balanced zine on whose mimeography I shall not harp.

Rating: 3

* * *

PHOBOS: 5c; bimonthly; Lee Anne Tremper, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis 1, Ind. Another zine from the Indiana Science Fiction Association; it must contain a higher percentage of active fans than any other club now going. This one was formerly *Isfaneews*; it still keeps a low price tag while containing quite a bit besides club news.

In this issue Orville Mosher writes on “N3F, 1955,” an account of the current doings of the National Fantasy Fan Federation. He mentions the fact that both the N3F and Operation Fantast have lending libraries for their members; now the two groups have a reciprocal arrangement so that OF members on this side of the Atlantic can borrow from the N3F library and vice versa.

Also, there are book reviews by J. T. Crackel, foreign reviews by Robert Coulson, and fanzine reviews by the editor. The zine is a slim one, only 12 pages, but it doesn't have a big price tag either.

Rating: 5

* * *

FOG: 10c; Don Wegars, 2444 Valley St., Berkeley 2, Calif. Now that Geis is concentrating most of his efforts on his own *Psychotic*, *Fog* has lost his services as columnist. It holds up pretty well though, with a Convention report by the editor, a sort of roving column by Denis

Moreen, and an opinion of how science fiction is written by Terry (Face Critturs) Carr.

The last mentioned, Carr's "Stuff and Nonsense" states that writers don't write by logically developing an idea; that ideas and developments of same sort of drift up from the writer's subconscious; and that anyway the writer better start with one of the "Basic Plots" if he wants to sell his story. Maybe so, at least in respect to the subconscious drift but just what are these "Basic Plots" Carr so glibly mentions, and where does the writer latch on to a list of them?

Moreen's article is mainly about the Space Patrol Mask you can get by sending in cereal box tops. Doesn't sound too spaceworthy, from the description.

Dittoed on yellow paper, this one manages to look pretty good. But I still think it's a misake not to justify the margins—so it would take maybe fifteen minutes a page. Is that a big outlay of time, percentage-wise?

Rating: 4

* * *

ISFA: 15c; bimonthly; Edward McNulty, 5645 N. Winthrop St., Indianapolis, Ind. The Indiana Science Fiction Association sponsors this one; the Association and its fellow members of the STF League of Indiana seem to turn out a lot of zines. *Mertin*, *Sli*, *Eisfa*, *Femzine*, and *Phobos* in addition to this one.

In this issue there's a weird story, Barbara Scott Burkert's "Emilie." It has all the elements — an ancient devil worship, extreme longevity, possession by the devil.

Quite well written, but no really new twists.

There's considerable space devoted to the Isfan's opinion of the Gleeps (The Galactic Glee and Perloo Science Fiction Society.) You could hardly call these organizations chummy; whether they'll work up enough animosity to rate space in Moskowitz' next is doubtful, though.

Robert Coulson's book reviews this issue are given over to "borderline" science-fantasy novels and sf classics. I enjoyed his way of reviewing very much—especially his summing up of Robert Nathan's "But Gently Day."

Mimeography in general is slightly substandard, with the artwork being noticeably poorly reproduced. Rating: 5

* * *

OPERATION FANTAST: U. S. representative J. Ben Stark, 290 Kenyon Ave, Berkeley 8, Calif. Capt. K. F. Slater heads OF from 22 Broad St., Syston, Leics., England. Subscriptions are 7-6 or \$1.00 in the U. S. and cover four issues of OF, plus the *Operation Fantast Handbook* and other material issued during the same period. I don't know about single copies, but you could undoubtedly get samples.

Through *Operation Fantast* you can contact fans all over the world; it's truly an international group with many services to its members.

The zine itself is printed, quite professional in appearance and contains news and reviews from many countries. In this issue there's a review of the Third Australian S-F Convention, which had 123 fans attending . . . Conventions are getting big everywhere these years.

Cedric Walker comments on an article in the *Manchester Guardian* about science fiction's becoming respectable. Apparently the article covers the field a bit tongue in cheek, and Mr. Walker reciprocates in kind.

Rating: 4

* * *

EISFA: 5c; monthly; Robert and Juanita Coulson, 626 Court St., Huntington, Ind. The Eastern Indiana Science Fiction Association puts out this mimeoed zine, which gives you quite a variety of fiction, columns, fanzine reviews and letters for your nickel. (The anniversary issue will be a dime — but much larger than usual.)

In this issue editor Robert Coulson turns to fiction writing with "The Glory Hand." It's a fantasy based on the superstition that the hand of a man who has been hanged will lead you to treasure. There's a studiously weird habitat — "an abandoned building on a lonely clearing in the moonlight" but unfortunately the story travels along well-worn paths.

Juanita Coulson's movie reviews are at least as much fun as the movies she picks on; Dave Norman covers a good portion of the fanzine field with his reviews; and there's a lot of informal chit-chat in the "Ramblings" and "Rumbings" depts. This may be a club zine, but it reaches out to more than club interest.

Unpretentious, but look at the price tag.

Rating: 5

* * *

FANTASY-TIMES: 10c; twice a month; Fandom House, P. O. Box

2331, Paterson 23 N. J. James V. Taurasi and Ray Van Houten have on their masthead, in addition to the title and "The World of Tomorrow Today!", the claim, "World's Oldest Science Fiction Newspaper." With Tucker not having published his newsletter in some time and with no other claimants to the title that I can see, this one must lead by a decade or so. Fourteen years, it's been going.

The news runs mainly to what's happening in the professional science fiction publishing field—changes of editorial policy, changes of editors, new magazines starting or old ones stopping. You'll find news of all the other stf media as well — book publishing, TV, radio, movies. In addition to world wide coverage of pro stf you'll find fan affairs covered also, with special convention announcements and conventions reports from here and abroad.

Rating: 3

* * *

KAYMAR TRADER: 10c; or 3/25c; monthly; K. Martin Carlson, 1028 3rd Ave. So., Moorhead, Minn. The zine for collectors, where you can find listed all sorts of fantasy and stf material.

If you're building a collection of anything science-fictional and are short some items it's entirely possible that you'll find them listed for sale in the first issue you get. If you don't see them advertised you can always try a want ad. Buyers, sellers, and swappers will see it.

Of course, if you're selling instead of buying you'll find it relatively inexpensive to list your

wares here.

There's little reading material in KT: just lists of books and magazines, their condition (mint, good, with or without dust jackets, minus covers etc.) and their price. A must for collectors.

Rating: 6

* * *

DEVIANT: 20c; quarterly; Carol McKinney; Sta. L, Box 514, Provo, Utah. Richard Geis leads off the articles with "Psychotic and Me," the inside story of the earlier issues of his fanzine. Traced cover, that #1? Wish I could trace like that . . . On the subject of covers, Geis admits a preference for the humorous and satirical type he's used several times so successfully, but he says that some readers dislike them. Why? Should all fanzines have a message?

Bill Venable divides fandom into two categories—the doers and the talkers. Of course, he admits it's an overgeneralization, that many fans (and non-fans) fall partly into each group. With this qualification his division seems valid enough. But granted that some fans are actively writing, editing, running clubs and working on conventions, while others just want to sit back and read and discuss science fiction or fandom, what can you do about it?

Dorothy Hansen concludes her "Cities of the Atom" and Harlan Ellison has a sort of post-post anti-war story called "Vista." Plus Face Critturs by Terry Carr.

A most original cover. And excellent mimeography, too.

Rating: 2

* * *

AARDVARK: 10c; Bob Hoskins, Lyons Falls, New York. This one would surely be first if fanzines were listed alphabetically. Is that why you picked the name, Bob?

This is the first issue of the zine, a rather slim dittoed one. It's almost a one-man affair, with one poem and one article not by the editor. Mike Phillips' "Science Fiction - Boom and Bust" compares the lush years of 1939-1943 with those of 1948-1953, listing the sf magazines that commenced publication in each of the two periods as well as those that entered the field at other times. If the lists are anywhere near complete (I've spotted a few omissions already) the parallel is interesting indeed.

Rating: 7

* * *

SLI: Lee Anne Tremper, 1022 N. Tuxedo St., Indianapolis 1, Ind. Another zine from Indiana's prolific STF League, SLI is the organization's newsletter. It's distributed free to members of the League, who may either belong to one of the League's member clubs or join individually. (Dues in the Indiana Science Fiction Association are \$2.00 a year, or \$2.50 in Indianapolis; dues in the Eastern Indiana Science Fiction Association are \$1.25 a year; individual League memberships are \$.50 a year.)

Rating: 6

* * *

That's all for this time. Remember, if you have a fanzine you want reviewed send it to me, Mari Wolf, *Fandora's Box*, IMAGINATION, Box 230, Evanston, Illinois. See you next issue . .

—Mari Wolf

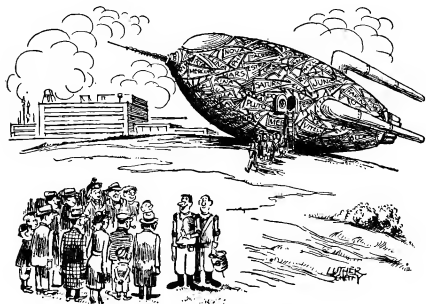
★ *The Transistor Grows Up* ★

Recently announced by the research laboratories of the Minneapolis-Honeywell Regulator Company, was a 5-watt transistor! This immediately opens a whole new field of application to this substitute — or — better, successor — of the vacuum tube. Now transistors can be used in many places where only bulky, hot, inefficient vacuum tubes could be used before.

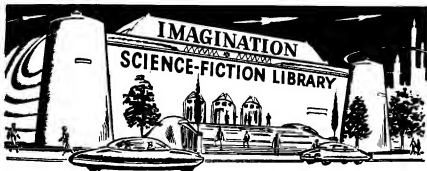
Radar and electronic equipment is bulky all out of proportion to what it is to accomplish. Transis-

tors make it possible really to "package" the gear. With transistors of reasonable power capacities such as the five-watt job, TV stations and radar stations can be as mobile as radio transmitters.

This miniaturization of electronic gear promises fantastic things for the future. In every way, from cost to technical aspects, transistorized equipment is the answer to present design requirements. The black box that man is carrying, is really a TV station!



"We had a little trouble finding our way back!"



— REVIEWING CURRENT SCIENCE FICTION BOOKS —

Conducted by Henry Bott

Hard cover science fiction is booming and many fine novels and anthologies are available at all bookstores or by writing direct to the publishers. Each month IMAGINATION will review one or more — candidly — as a guide to your book purchases.

THE BEST FROM FANTASY AND SCIENCE FICTION

Edited by Anthony Boucher, 250 pages, \$3.50, Doubleday & Company, Inc. Garden City, New York.

Boucher, invariably, is an honest anthologist. By that I mean he applies a touchstone of the highest excellence to each story he selects. I can level but one criticism against his selectivity; he will occasionally pick a piece of Victorian fantasy whose only merit it seems to me, is in that it bears the name of a prominent author of the time. But I won't cavil at that. This is an excellent anthology.

Alfred Bester's "Fondly Fahrenheit", Poul Anderson's "Immortal Game", Richard Matheson's "The Test", Shirley Jackson's "Bulletin", and Daniel Galouye's "Sanctuary", I found exceptionally good, among other good stories.

J. Francis McComas presents a delightful conceit in a theme that hasn't often been treated in science-fiction, in fact I recall it only being seriously considered in history—this is the theme of how the conception of *Commerce* originated. The story is not extraordinary, and there is the usual difficulty in presenting a suitable dialogue among truly primitive peoples, but everything else is entertaining.

Someone should attempt, this reminds me, to make a serious effort to devise a technique for presenting conversation and dialogue as practiced by primitive or ancient peoples, in a believable manner. I'm not convinced the caveman said, "Ugh—me kill Snaggle-Tooth—me want girl," i.e., that isn't a reasonable facsimile of his speech!

Letters

from the

Readers

US BONEHEADS!

Dear Bill:

Let's get all of the pleasantries out of the way so I can get down to the serious business at hand—gripping, naturally.

The March issue stories were quite a bit above average. THE LONG WAY HOME rated high with me. But what I'm really pleased about was the masterful handling, via the editorial, of the Bott-Asimov affair. Especially Bott's reply. Asimov's little crying jag in PEON was one of the stupidest things I've seen—especially coming from him. Kudos to Bott for a beautifully dry, sensibly done reply.

Serials: In a word—phooey! I can hardly remember from one day to the next what I read in fiction, so how am I supposed to wait a month?

Comments on the EDITOR'S CHOICE controversy. Frankly, I think you and Sam Moskowitz are both guilty of a little double-dealing, with Sam possibly leading you

in points. But then he's been at it longer. Also, over the weekend I remember hearing (can't remember from who) that the story you submitted from Madge was one of your own under a pen-name. Don't blow a gasket. I heard it via rumor only and am not spreading it as such.

Space Stations again. I don't agree completely with every little thing Dan Curran says, but your answer hits a new low in bone-headedly middle-class platitudes. So now we're the only bulwark against the Thought Police. From what I've seen there's been quite a bit of thought policing going on this side of the bulwark. As soon as somebody comes out with a radical political idea or dares to criticize the U. S. everybody turns, gasps, whispers, or shouts—"D'you hear that? Russian! Moscow! Kremlin plot!"

Oh well. I still like the sexy covers. More please.

Dick Ellington
171 St. Marks Ave.
Brooklyn 38, N. Y.

Don't know where you heard that

rumor, Dick, but it's certainly a silly one. The story we recommended for the Moskowitz anthology was PATROL by Richard Nelson (October 52 issue). Nelson is a resident of Portland, Oregon, and writes all too little stf. Sorry we can't take credit for writing the story—but thanks for the compliment! . . . Hadn't noticed any thought-policing to speak of, chum, but understand t'other side of the bulwark offers complete accommodations. They should be sitting in a space station thinking down on us? You bonehead, you! More covers by McCauley coming up . . . wlh

A PLEASANT TREND

Dear wlh:

Re Jeremy J. Millett's letter in the March issue: ". . . the great majority of your readers don't like serials . . ." And, ". . . any magazine that runs material readers don't like . . . won't be around long."

Wonder where Mr. Millett got the idea that readers—the vast majority!—don't like serials? Perhaps he took sort of a Gallup poll of the readership? My dear Mr. J. J. M.! If serials could kill a magazine, at least three of the big name mags would no longer be with us. In addition to Madge, Astounding, Galaxy, and The Magazine of Fantasy and Science Fiction carry serials! Some of the top science fiction of all time first appeared as magazine serials! Rather than hurt a mag, serials are time-honored circulation builders, as witness Argosy weekly. With a number of serials running at the same time, the reader was lured into reading the magazine every

week, for no sooner did one serial end than another began. No, J. J., serials will never harm a magazine!

Madge's covers are very good. And if the one on the March issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES is a sample, I hope you HAVE started a trend!

Wilkie Conner
1514 Poston Circle
Gastonia, N. C.

Seen the July issue of IMAGINATIVE TALES yet? If not, run to your nearest newsdealer and pick up a copy. McCauley outdid himself—as usual! . . . wlh

BEST IN 43 ISSUES . . .

Dear wlh:

A brickbat and a bouquet.

First of all, the brickbat is for the back cover caption of the March *Madge*. There are essentially two types of nebula, the gaseous nebula, and the galactic nebula—or galaxy. Of course, a galaxy is actually not a nebula at all. The term "nebula" was applied to all the fuzzy blotches in the skies back in the days when telescopic resolving power was slight. As telescopes improved, however, and as various astronomic techniques, especially measuring techniques, were perfected, it became apparent that these galactic nebula were in reality huge systems of stars, similar to our Milky Way, but lying outside it at distances ranging upward from several thousand light-years.

The second sort of nebula turned out to be part of our own system, and was composed of clouds of dust and gas which shown by re-

flected light, and not by illumination of their own. Some of these nebula are considered to be stars in the making, others masses of as yet undifferentiated material, and still others the remains of stars that have met with catastrophe. The Ring Neubla of Lyra, pictured on the back cover of the *March Madge*, belongs to this last type. The gas which composes the ring is illuminated by the star located in the center of the system. (The other star is either a more distant one shining through or a nearer star partly eclipsing the ring, I forget which.) This star is of a typical post-nova type, and since spectroscopic observation indicates that the ring is expanding outward from a center in the vicinity of this star, it is assumed that the ring consists of material that was blown off from the sun in some unimaginably powerful explosion ages in the past.

The bouquet to George O. Smith's first full length novel in much too long a time. Smith is one of my favorite writers; he is one of the few I will go back and read over and over.

Ever since the efficiency expert threw out the atmosphere plant in the first Venus Equalateral stories, Smith has been coming up with intriguing wrinkles. In *HIGHWAYS IN HIDING* the mutually exclusive types of psychic mutations are an example. So are the "dead spots". The real secret of his writing, though, is his breezy optimism. It is a secret he shares with Doc Smith, deCamp, Weinbaum, Van Vogt, and practically nobody else. Quite simply, George O. Smith is fun to read.

If the balance of the novel keeps up the pace set by Part I, the tale should be the best in 43 issues . . .

Al Lewis
706 San Lorenzo St.
Santa Monica, Cal.

Your letter was one of many pointing out our error in the back cover captioning of the March issue, Al. As you point out, the "Ring" is thought to be gaseous in nature, rather than composed of many star clusters. We apologize for the bubu with

BETWEEN THE LINES . . .

Dear Bill:

In the *March Madge* editorial you printed an open letter to Isaac Asimov by Henry Bott. In this editorial you stated flatly that Bott was well qualified to do his job as a book reviewer, giving his background, etc.

Step back and take the viewpoint of a reader. This reader hasn't been reading stf very long. About a year, let's say. He buys *Madge* regularly, and also *Astounding* and *Galaxy*. He perhaps buys the hard-cover books on occasion. Do you honestly think he would take Bott's opinion over, say, Groff Conklin (*Galaxy*) or P. Schuyler Miller (*Astounding*)? Or, do you think he would take the opinion of Bott over Mr. Asimov?

Let's face it, Bill, Mr. Bott doesn't have the background (in being famous and well-known) nor the literary ability to criticize Mr. Asimov the way he does. Bott drags Asimov through the mud. He says he's not a writer. He calls his books all kinds of things.

And I think I voice the opinions

of a large portion of your readers.

The thing you are saying (I can read between the lines!) is that you think Mr. Bott is more capable of making an opinion on a book than Mr. Conklin, Mr. Miller, or Mr. Asimov himself. How can you say that?

Randy Brown
6619 Anita St.
Dallas 14, Texas

Reading between the lines can be interesting, Randy, but it usually doesn't adhere to the facts of the actual text. How you were able to "read in" the names of Conklin and Miller beats us! But to answer your first question, if a reader has been following stf for just a short time, the names of Conklin-Miller-Bott (with all due respect) as famous or well-known people in the field would be problematic. To a "new" reader names such as these would have no special renown. So even if we granted your conclusion—which we don't—your opinion can hardly be taken as the view of the reader you hypothesize as average. In answer to your last question, we have in no way attempted to put Henry Bott on a reviewing pedestal over other critics. We do, however, feel he is as capable and/or qualified as any other . . . wth

HIGH ON FORTITUDE

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Most of the stories in *Madge*, from the beginning, have been up with the very best, a few have been average, and only one or two way below par. All your features are excellent. To me this speaks well for you and your staff. Having started reading science fiction

about 1933 it may give your ego a lift to know that though I read several stf mags, *Madge* is the only one I subscribe to.

Usually I am against serials, but HIGHWAYS IN HIDING certainly, if the first installment is any criterion, is an exception. I also realize that this is the only way you can bring good material of great length to your readers. I look forward to the balance of the serial with anticipation.

I like your (politely speaking) intestinal fortitude in speaking up for your book reviewer, Henry Bott. However, I could expect no less from you, having read you month after month since the beginning of *Madge*.

R. Vancort Dorn
315 14th St., NW
Albuquerque, New Mex.

Rest assured that only the best of novel lengths will be serialized in Madge. Now that you've finished HIGHWAYS, drop us a line on your final verdict . . . wth

MORE MCCAULEY!

Dear Bill:

I would like to congratulate you on your new cover policy - Wow! Keep up those McCauley covers and you'll have every book in the field trying to copy you!

What is this guy Jeremy L. Millett talking about in the March letter column? If it weren't for serials, readers would miss some of the truly great science fiction; in addition, a person often gets tired of reading shorts—they're over before they start! I think a few good serials a year won't hurt any magazine. It seems to me that those

who argue against serials are people who rarely read books!

Whoever gave you the idea to include cartoons in *Madge* should get a bonus. My favorite is the "hairy BEM" series by Luther Scheffy. Don't suppose you could crowd in two of these each month . . . ?

The first thing I turn to is the cartoons—then to the letter section where I follow the debate on the Space Station. My feelings are that we *must* own the first—and all—such stations—at least until the "dictator" nations become republics! Also, what's all this talk about one space station—why not 3 or 4 to give total world coverage at all times?

Keep up the good work with *Madge*.

Pfc. Eric N. Harlow
9615 TU, Sig. C. Elect. Tr. Det.
Redstone Arsenal
Huntsville, Ala.

Let's get one station up there first, Eric! And don't forget, the basic reason for a space station is to utilize it as an assist in achieving space travel—a jumping off point. Its use as a weapon against our planet's surface would be a threat only if the Commies beat us in constructing one. That's the big worry . . . with

ASTUTE EDITING . . .

Dear Bill:

This is not for publication and not soft-soaping the editor, either. But I want to congratulate you for your stand in support of Henry Bott's book reviews.

I've known Isaac Asimov (by correspondence) for a long time—since before he sold his first story

to *Amazing Stories* and I know he has lots of good points and that taking issue with a book reviewer is a mistake, and everyone is prone to make mistakes. This is why I would not like to have this letter published. I don't want him to feel I'm not his friend, which I am. I don't want to err by getting into the fight.

However, I know that a writer feels in a strange way toward his work. He can realize his work is not the best, but he hates to have it called bad. Pride and conceit are occupational hazards of writing. I've tried to avoid the disease, but I know I feel very bad when someone speaks disparagingly of my work. (I can take a joke about it and I laughed loudly at Plank's humorous jibe on our mental state.) But I can never understand why they rate Shakespeare so high and me so low!

But what I like about your stand is having an editor back a writer up. I spent many years of my life as a newspaperman. Terribly underpaid. But I love a pig-headed old editor I used to have who would stand back of me no matter what I did. I can remember a row I had with a prominent lawyer when I got hold of a "hot" case he was trying to keep out of the paper.

He started out to see my boss. I went down the alley. I came in the back door as he came in the front and we both reached the boss' desk at the same time. The lawyer started in with his courtroom speech. The boss listened. Then he said: "Winterbotham has orders to bring in the news. He was following orders. If you've got any beef, beef with me." The lawyer lost his

case. (I'd swiped the case when he wasn't looking, too. He was trying to hide it, though.) Bott no doubt was hired to give a valued opinion on books, and he was earning his money. So you, Mr. Hamling, are an astute editor.

Asimov's mistake was yapping about it. He told me Bott never read the book, but I don't think that's right. Lots of people read things into my stories that I never knew were there.

This letter is too long for one not for publication. I just like to praise somebody doing the right thing. If you're going to be an editor, stand back of what you print or don't print it. To you, orchids!

Russ Winterbotham
1582 Woodward
Lakewood 7, Ohio.

Although you stated your letter was not for publication, Russ, we've taken the liberty of doing just that. As a newspaperman you know that an opinion not expressed is an opinion of little merit. We like your opinion, and thank you for the compliment extended . . . with

HIDE THE GAL'S?

Dear Mr. Hamling:

Happens as how I purchased a copy of the March *Madge* at my neighborhood newsstand this evening, and happens as how it's a pretty good issue. Time was when you printed a lot of dismal ninth-rate stuff, but if this issue is an indication, things are looking up. A couple more issues like this and I might even subscribe. Well played!

Two comments:

a. One vote *pro* Henry Bott and *anti* or *contra* Isaac Asimov.

b. The serial beginning in this issue would be, as would many of your previous stories have been, better without the occasional coy references to the physical endowments of young ladies, garments involved with such endowments, and the more pleasing uses to which such endowments may be put. Science being science and fiction being fiction, fine and/or dandy, but I prefer both without adulterants and "frosting". Perhaps I am in the minority. Love as a human attribute is legal tender for the stffictioneer, but should either be eliminated if the writer can't handle it maturely, or be dealt with *sans* cliches.

I'm neither anti-bosom or anti-BEM, but a place for everything—

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and to finish the cliché — everything in its place.

Jay Benn
1410 York Ave.,
New York 21, N. Y.

Can't for the life of us figure out where HIGHWAYS fits the "endowment" critique you offer. But anyway, we're glad to know you're not anti-gals in fiction. Would be mighty dull reading without a fair mixture of that which makes life so pleasant! . . . with

SCORE ONE FOR MADGE

Dear Bill:

Well, I hate to admit it. You were right and I was wrong. Remembering your only other attempt at a serial, I predicted HIGHWAYS IN HIDING would be a stinker.

After having read Part I in the March issue I find that it is, instead, very good!

Now I have a question. It is, and I quote "What happened to Richard H. Nelson?" He had the best story Madge has ever published, back in the October 1952 issue. After that, not a word further. Is he resting on his laurels, or just what? Let's have another story by him!

Jeremy J. Millett
1446 Garden St.
Park Ridge, Ill.

Glad you think so highly of Nelson's story, PATROL. It was this story we selected for the Moskowitz EDITORS' CHOICE, as mentioned earlier in this month's column. If Dick reads this, get that typewriter in gear and keep Madge's readers happy! . . . with

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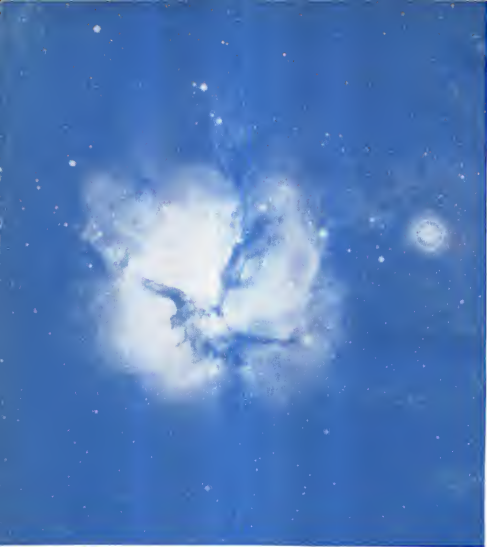
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TOMORROW'S SCIENCE

NEBULA IN SAGITTARIUS: "Gaseous" appearing star cloud was photographed in red light with 200 inch telescope. Immense distance from Earth is measured in hundreds of thousands of light years — with light traveling 186,000 miles per second!

Another scan
by
cape1736

